

GROTTO GRAN



Among thriving species in the garden are daylilies, above, and coreopsis.



Volunteers give historic spot new

By LINDA STAHL
The Courier-Journal

The gardens of the St. Joseph Infirmary Grotto are abloom again. Orange daylilies, yellow coreopsis, purple petunias and red snapdragons provide color and beauty.

Fragrant ferns and astilbes catch the breeze.

The Grotto Grannies — a half-dozen determined women in their 70s and 80s — and donors from all over Jefferson County are responsible for the floral splendor now on display at the beloved stone grotto area just north of Eastern Parkway between Preston Street and Bradley Avenue.

The grotto was once a place for prayer on the grounds of the old St. Joseph Infirmary and its nursing school. The infirmary was demolished in the 1950s, and the school's dormitory was turned into what is now Lourdes Hall, a public housing development for the elderly. University Park Apartments also were built on the hospital grounds.

But the grotto, which dates to 1927, remained — a remnant of an era when people went there to pray for patients in the hospital.

The Grotto Grannies are volunteers from the St. Joseph Neighborhood Association who were concerned that the grotto had fallen on bad times and had become a hangout for vagrants and juveniles. It was littered with trash and piles of big, brown leaves shed by the magnolia trees that surround it.

Last year Doris Patterson, Ruth Gerlach, Lillian Lile, Datsie Brignola, Helen Spaulding and Elizabeth Faust began to rescue the grotto from neglect with the help of spouses, children and friends. They removed the leaves, liquor bottles and other litter, dug up the compacted soil, and started growing things.

The grotto once featured the Stations of the Cross, statues, a fountain, a pool with goldfish, a sandal and rose gardens. But all that was long gone when the Grannies stepped in. What remains is an impressive, cavernlike stone structure — the actual grotto — sitting at the



Lillian Lile, one of the six Grotto Grannies, removed fallen magnolia leaves as she helped clean up the grotto. The cavernlike stone structure of the grotto, dating to

1927, was once a place for prayer on the grounds of the old St. Joseph Infirmary and its nursing school.

Early last summer the women planted the spaces between the walkways with dozens of begonias.

But their initial efforts were thwarted by vandals who tore out the plants, damaging them so badly they couldn't be replanted.

Then the women got donations of perennial plants and put them into the soil immediately after the begonia massacre.

By last July, the perennials had vanished.

ing to keep going on," Lile promised.

"Doesn't it just look beautiful?" the 73-year-old Gerlach said last week as she and Lile worked in the garden, picking up magnolia leaves and plucking spent blossoms from petunias.

They used long sticks with nails on the end to snag the leaves and drag them to the walks, where they can sweep them into piles. Gerlach's husband, Bud, made the sticks for them.

er businesses that donated more than \$1,000 worth of plants.

Scorbage, Iring, Wallie Kmart, Winn-Dixie, Meijer's, Ocean Brightside, Assaf's at Haymarket. We had donations the way from Dixie Highway to East End to downtown.

"And then there was the mystery lady. . . She planted the snapdragons. Someone from the apartment saw her, but we don't know who she is."

The Grotto Grannies were s