

Restored grotto receives additional restoration

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The grotto on the grounds that once held St. Joseph Infirmary was created back in 1926 and dedicated a year later. Now, after volunteers for the St. Joseph Area Association restored the grotto two years ago, it has been given another bit of renovation.

The grotto's Stations of the Cross have been repainted, thanks to the efforts of local artist Dwayne Beckhart.

According to Ruth Gerlach, a member of the area association, the grotto was made a local and state historic landmark in 2001. "At the time we thought we would get someone to repaint the Stations of the Cross then," Gerlach said. "But it took us another two years to get final approval to do it."

The work at the site has to be approved by the University of Louisville Foundation, which now owns the property, and the local historic landmark preservation office, she said.

"Once we had everyone's approval, Dwayne and his mother, Marlene Beckhart, we went right to work," Gerlach said. "He did the painting and she helped with cleaning and planting flowers."

As a result, the grotto is alive with color; its walkways are lined with various plants and flowers and the Stations of the Cross are in bright pigments.

The grotto was dedicated again last week by Father Terry Langford, pastor of Our Mother of Sorrows Church, which is just across Eastern Parkway from the site.

The association that restored the grotto meets at Eastern Parkway Baptist Church, but Gerlach is quick to note that its members "represent lots of different denominations. We're Catholics, Baptists, and lots of others," she said. "When our president decided in 1999 that we should clean the grotto and restore it, we had no idea what we were getting into."

The work began in 2000, she said, and the volunteers worked on the project for two



Record Photo by Glenn Rutherford

The grotto on the grounds that once held St. Joseph Infirmary was recently the recipient of additional renovation work, which included the painting of the Stations of the Cross by local artist Dwayne Beckhart.

years, making certain all the improvements were properly approved by all the necessary landowners and agencies.

"Now our only worry is vandalism," she noted. "Somebody did some spray painting over there recently; I don't know why anyone wants to do things like that."

The roots of St. Joseph Infirmary stretch back to 1836 when it was established by Mother Catherine Spalding, who also was founder of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth.

The hospital moved from downtown Louisville to the site on Eastern Parkway, between Preston Street and Bradley Avenue, in 1926. The facility was sold to Extencicare (the company that was to become Humana, Inc.) in 1970, and the building was razed a decade later.