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ST. JOSEPH

Wedding a sign of new life at restored infirmary grotto

By MARTHA HUBB

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The Courier-Journal

The first "big event" at the newly restored St. Joseph Grotto got off to a roaring finish recently, as the bride and groom roared down the stone side of their motorcycle.

Pam Franck, a 37-year-old hairdresser who was born at the old St. Joseph infirmary, and James Bernard of the St. Joseph neighborhood, chaplain of the Kentucky Motorcycle Association, were married in the peaceful enclave off Eastern Parkway between Bradley Avenue and Post in Street, where some once visited the Stations of the Cross. The attendants were "Daytona Edge Truck" Inc. and the procession was "Teacher and Last."

"I just fell in love with it," Franck said. "It's a beautiful place right in the middle of the city. I didn't even know it was there."

The festivities — witnessed by a grotto from the St. Joseph Area Neighborhood Association — were a sign of new life for the grotto.

It has been undergoing renovation by neighborhood residents since a state historical marker was placed nearby at Eastern Parkway and Post in Street two years ago. The grotto also was designated as a state and city landmark last year.

Residents worked for three hours before the wedding, and their families said afterward that everyone "behaved beautifully. We didn't even have one flower that was trampled down."

The neighborhood association had a flagpole installed at the grotto recently for about \$300, and about \$1000 more has been raised for a grotto fund, said association treasurer Hank Kistler. Fund raising for more restoration is proceeding after a recent ruling by the state attorney general's office that no violation of constitutional separation of church and state is involved.

The opinion, which was sought by the neighborhood association, said that the University of Louisville, which owns the site, may authorize the use of the grotto funds for restoration of the religious site, which was created by the Sisters of

USING THE GROTTA

To inquire about using the St. Joseph Grotto, call Bruce Traugott at University of Louisville (502-621-1111).

Contributions for the grotto restoration fund should be mailed for the grotto and sent to: St. Joseph Area Neighborhood Association, 510 Warnock St., Louisville, Ky. 40217.

Quality of Habitat

The grotto is not a public park. Potential users need to get permission from the university, said Larry Overby, U of L's vice president for finance and administration.

In addition to the infirmary, which was razed in the 1960s, the site originally included the St. Joseph Infirmary School of Nursing, now Lourdes Hall public housing. The facilities dated back to 1926.

On the new flagpole is a neighborhood association banner designed by Denise Smith of the Germantown area, depicting the grotto, one of 13 recently paid for with \$2.9M from Nilesman Capital Alliance's discount store funds.

Grotto supporters also hope to raise enough money to replace the Stations of the Cross representations of Christ's final hours and replace statues of Our Lady of Lourdes and Bernadette, a girl who is said to have seen visions of the Virgin Mary.

Residents also had a wedding prelude at the grotto last year, said, on the day of the wedding, it was brimming with flowers. Among the gardeners is Melissa Lee, whose plot is named "Grotto's Little Bit of Heaven."

Residents are eager to promote small events there. "We'd like for it to catch on," Dawn Patterson said.

But events must be in keeping with the nature of the site. "It's still a religious place, so for us we're concerned," Lee said.



PHOTO BY PHIL WOODRUFF, THE COURIER-JOURNAL. A St. Joseph Area Neighborhood Association marker was placed nearby.