

Paintings of Stations of the Cross enhance St. Joseph Grotto

Hikes Point artist's work culminates 3-year restoration

By MARTHA ELSON

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For about 20 years, the stone walls of the historic St. Joseph Grotto and Gardens off Eastern Parkway have been blank, lined with vacant niches that once contained mosaic scenes depicting the 14 Stations of the Cross.

Unfazed by a threatening sky and scattered raindrops last week, artist Dwane Beckhart of Hikes Point stood in the peaceful sanctuary near Bradley Avenue painting a scene titled "Jesus Meets the Weeping Women," which he took from a small book, "The Way of the Cross for Children." The stations tell of Jesus' final hours in earthly form.

Beckhart's parents lived nearby when he was born 46 years ago, and now he is back to re-create the stations on the smooth surfaces created when the niches were filled in with concrete two years ago.

A group of dedicated neighborhood volunteers considers Beckhart's project to be the crowning achievement of a three-year restoration of the 76-year-old grotto.

"It's a dream come true," said Gail Linville, president of the St. Joseph Area Association, after helping with a regular woody cleanup day at the site.

The association's final wish is to have statues of St. Bernadette and Our Lady of Lourdes (Mary) restored in a concave area at the front of the grotto.

The volunteers are inviting the public to stop by to see Beckhart's paintings and the rest of the restored grotto from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. They also will hand out information about it. (Parking is available at Eastern Parkway Baptist Church.)

"I've seen this place before. I figure telling Jesus' story might influence some people."

Artist Dwane Beckhart

The grotto property, which is off President's Boulevard next to the University Park Apartments, is owned by the University of Louisville, and university officials must approve the volunteers' efforts there.

The unusual outdoor shrine, inspired by a cave in France where the

Virgin Mary was said to have appeared to the young Bernadette in 1858 — was dedicated in 1927 behind the old St. Joseph Infirmary.

The architects were D.X. Murphy and Bros., Roman Catholics who designed numerous Catholic schools, churches and rectories in the Louisville region, according to a report by Joanne Weeter, historic-preservation officer for the Metro Development Authority. The infirmary was demolished in the 1960s and replaced by Audubon Hospital on Poplar Level Road.

St. Joseph resident Owsie Brigola, 83, said that nuns affiliated with the hospital prayed there every morning and that doctors came to pray before operations. The grotto formerly had a gate that was usually locked, but Brigola said she and her younger sister used to go in with a nun to help clean up.

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BY JIM WOODRUGH, THE COURIER-JOURNAL
Artist Dwane Beckhart painted scenes depicting Christ's final hours of earthly life on the walls of St. Joseph's Grotto and Gardens.