

NEWS

Our Lady of Lourdes Statue to Return to Top of Medical Center Tomorrow

MONDAY, APRIL 2, 2012

Lourdes staff and community anxiously await arrival of newly repaired statue

The beloved Our Lady of Lourdes statue that was taken down from atop Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center in November for repairs is expected to return back to her original resting place on Tuesday, April 3. Work crews are projected to begin preparing for reinstallation around 6 a.m. with the expectation that the statue will be up and secure before the end of the business day. The reinstallation of Our Lady of Lourdes marks exactly five months to the day since crews first took down the top three of six layers of the statute for extensive repairs due to structural damage it sustained in August's earthquake. Admirers of the 61-year-old regional landmark look forward to her safe return to the Camden skyline -- now looking as new as when she was first installed in 1950. As a safety precaution, the main entrance of the hospital located on Haddon Avenue along with the circular driveway will be closed. The emergency department entrance located on Vesper Boulevard will be open and will serve as the main entrance to the hospital. The inner part of Vesper Boulevard will be closed from Haddon Avenue to the emergency department entrance. Patients and visitors are asked to use the emergency department entrance of the hospital on Tuesday. All entrances and street closures are expected to be open and clear by Wednesday morning.

"We look forward to having Our Lady of Lourdes back with us," said Alexander J. Hatala, President and CEO of Lourdes Health System. "Her absence made us realize what a symbol of hope and healing she truly is - not just for Lourdes associates, but for the entire South Jersey community. She is undoubtedly the guiding light for our health system and the City of Camden."

Since November, the top three sections of the South Jersey icon underwent repairs by the Kreilick Conservation Company at the George Young facility in Swedesboro. Structural and cosmetic repairs and improvements included the carving and installation of new limestone using stainless steel dowels and epoxy, as well as drilling of interior holes in order to install additional tensioning bars and anchors for added structural support. A new illuminated halo was also installed thanks to a generous donation from MidAtlantic Sign Services.

The statue of the Virgin Mary holds a special place for the area's spiritual community and for many who seek inspiration. With a design similar to the famous Virgin Mary statue in the grotto shrine in the sanctuary in Lourdes, France, this holy monument is a bright landmark by day and a glowing standard by night--reaching skyward as one of the highest points in Camden.

"The Our Lady of Lourdes statue has always been an important part of our Lourdes family," said Ruth Cila, Executive Director for the Lourdes Health Foundation. "It is amazing how many local residents also feel the same and have come forward to share their stories through all of this. Even though she is made of stone, she encompasses a much deeper meaning and purpose to so many that transcends beyond just the physical."

History of Our Lady of Lourdes Statue

In the late 1940's, Bishop Bartholomew J. Eustace invited the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, N.Y., to open the first Catholic hospital in the Camden Diocese, which would later become Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center. The Sisters gave the Our Lady of Lourdes statue to the medical center as part of the project.

During its early construction, a cable failure almost sent the statue's head falling seven stories to the ground. After crews rescued and restored the top of the statue, the hospital's first administrator, Sister Mary Paraclata, wrote a note of blessings and placed it inside the head asking Our Lady to protect the city and its residents. The note was sewn into X-ray film to protect it. Bishop Eustace also placed a small relic of St. Francis inside the head to further protect the statue and the city of Camden.

Our Lady of Lourdes Statue Fact Sheet

- The Our Lady of Lourdes statue was raised to the top of the hospital on March 21, 1949 -- a year before the hospital was completed.
- The statue stands 30 feet high and weighs 15 tons.
- The statue's halo is 3 feet tall and weighs 1,000 pounds. The flashing halo once served as a beacon for passing aircrafts.
- The statue is made of rare Indiana limestone.
- The Our Lady of Lourdes statue is one of the highest points in Camden.
- The statue is one of the largest religious statues in the country.
- On August 23, 2011, a 5.8 magnitude earthquake struck the East Coast and shifted the top three of the statue's six layers, causing a vertical crack and significant chipping.
- On November 3, 2011, the top three damaged layers of the statue were taken down by the George Young Company and brought to their facility in Swedesboro, New Jersey to undergo repairs by Kreilick Conservation.
- Structural and cosmetic repairs and improvements were made including:
 - The carving and installation of new lime-based mortar using steel dowels and epoxy.
 - Inserting mortar repair patches to areas that were damaged. The lime-based mortar used to repair the statue has the same physical characteristics as limestone.
 - The mortar color was matched with stain materials to create a flawless finish.
 - Interior holes were drilled in order to install additional tensioning bars and anchors for added structural support.
 - A bright new illuminated halo was installed.
- More than 1,200 people donated over \$65,000 to restoring the statue including local businesses and schools.
- Donations came from all over the Delaware Valley and stretched as far as California, New Mexico and Georgia.
- The statue will be reinstalled a section at a time, beginning with Our Lady's torso and ending with her head.
- A rededication ceremony for the statue will be held in late spring/early summer. Date to be announced.

Itinerary for Statue Reinstallation

- **6:00 a.m.:** Work crews arrive to set up for the day.
- **8:00 a.m.:** The statue's midsection is expected to be lifted to the top of the medical center.
- **9:30/10:00 a.m.:** The statue's shoulder section is expected to be lifted up.
- **Break from 11:00 a.m. to noon**
- **12:30/1:00 p.m.:** The statue's head is expected to be lifted up.

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For media inquiries or interviews, please contact Lauren Markin at Markinl@lourdesnet.org or **(609) 206-5787**.

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Our Lady of Lourdes School of Nursing and Camden County College Conduct a Cooperative Program which grants the students a Diploma in Nursing from the School of Nursing and an Associate in Science Degree from [Camden County College](#).

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