

Mount Mercy College News  
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**N E W S**

# Mount Mercy College

1330 Elmhurst Drive NE  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402  
319-368-6475

## Mount Mercy College wins grant to restore grotto

CEDAR RAPIDS, Iowa (June 8, 2001) – Mount Mercy College has received a \$10,000 matching grant to restore the college-owned Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto.

The Conservation Treatment Award from Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS) – a joint effort by Heritage Preservation and the Smithsonian American Art Museum – will help preserve the Mount Mercy grotto that has fallen into disrepair in recent years.

Jane Gilmor, professor of art at Mount Mercy, says the funds will be used to save the remaining parts of the grotto. “Four separate stone structures still stand: two arch ways, a large monument to the Ten Commandments and a footbridge,” she says. “Time has taken a toll on the intricately constructed sections.”

The late William Lightner of Cedar Rapids built the Mount Mercy grotto over a twelve-year period, completed in 1941. He used an estimated 2.5 million pounds of stone including precious stones from around the world.

Lightner, who owned a construction company, personally collected the stones, rock, coral and petrified wood throughout the United States and Mexico. He traveled 40,000 miles and estimated his costs at \$42,000.

Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto was Lightner’s tribute to the Sisters of Mercy and the Virgin Mary. He converted to Catholicism at the age of 33 and undertook the grotto project when the Sisters suggested a shrine to the Virgin Mary.

Mount Mercy’s Gilmor will work with Smithsonian Conservator Anton Rajer of Madison, Wis., on the grotto restoration project at Mount Mercy. The \$30,000 project is only halfway financed and a fundraising campaign will kick off during the summer 2001.

For more information about the Our Mothers of Sorrow Grotto restoration project, contact Jane Gilmor at 363-1323, ext. 1211 or visit <http://www.mtmercy.edu/grotto.htm> on the Web.

Located in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Mount Mercy College is a four-year, Catholic, professional and liberal arts college.

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### Contacts:

Greg Kanz, Assistant Director of College Relations, 368-6475, [gkanz@mtmercy.edu](mailto:gkanz@mtmercy.edu);  
Teel Salaun, Director of College Relations, 368-6475, [tsalaun@mtmercy.edu](mailto:tsalaun@mtmercy.edu); Jane  
Gilmor, professor of art and grotto project coordinator, 363-1323, ext. 1211 or 365-6741.

# Fact Sheet

## Our Mother of Sorrows Grotto restoration project

- Jane Gilmor, professor of art at Mount Mercy College, is the chair of the two-year, grotto restoration project. (Contact: 319-365-6741 or Gilmor@mtmercy.edu)
- Total budget of \$30,000
  - \$13,000 Personnel (Conservation Professional Anton Rajer, SOS Heritage Preservation/Smithsonian Institution)
  - \$10,000 Supplies and materials (mosaic, stone, etc.)
  - \$7,000 Fees and Services (contractor, lab analysis, landscaping)
- Total fundraising as of June 1, 2001 = \$16,000
  - \$10,000 SOS! Heritage Preservation Grant from the Smithsonian Institution
  - \$6,000 Cash donations to "Friends of The Grotto"
- Donations may be sent payable to "Friends of the Grotto," Mount Mercy College, 1330 Elmhurst Drive NE, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 52402.
- Restoration timeline
  - Spring/Summer 2001 Grotto Condition Assessment report completed by Smithsonian Conservator Anton Rajer
    - Placement of historic plaque
    - Fundraising campaign, community outreach activities and workshops
  - Fall/Spring 2001-02 Kick-off ceremony for restoration project during alumni weekend in October
    - Volunteer restoration workshops with conservator Anton Rajer
    - "Folk Art Environments" lecture by Susannah Koerber, curator, Art Museum of Western Virginia
  - Summer 2002 Rajer onsite for five weeks to teach course in folk art conservation and complete structural restoration with volunteers
  - Fall 2002 Complete reflecting pond and landscaping
  - May 1, 2003 Rededication celebration with reenactment of traditional May Day pageant and May Crowning