

SJU's Stella Maris Chapel gets a facelift

By John F. O'Sullivan

A grant from a Prep School alum is giving a facelift to one of SJU's most recognizable landmarks.

Renovation to the Stella Maris (meaning "Star of the Sea") Chapel began this spring.

Don Hall, a 1955 Prep student, found the chapel disappointing when he visited it three years ago, and donated funds towards its renovation, said Mike Mullin, St. John's Prep Director of Development.

“The idea is that it’s a gift to the world,” Mullin said. “It will provide an even more inspirational place of pilgrimage.”

Currently, the scaffolding surrounding the Stella Maris Chapel is visible from across the lake.

Midway through the construction, renovators removed the altar and stone buttresses, closed off the large entrance in preparation for a circular window, opened a door under the steeple and applied stucco to the walls.

Work is far from complete on the chapel, due partially to the unexpected death of SJU Physical Plant Director Br. Linus Ascherman this summer.

Mullin said renovation could finish as early as this autumn. Br. David Paul Lange, a member of the design committee, said it could be as late as spring.

Lange said the design’s purpose is to return the chapel to what it looked like generations ago. The design committee decided to eliminate the chapel’s stone buttresses, originally added to reinforce the walls of the building, in order to “bring the chapel back to a streamlined, simplified shape,” he said.

Not everyone is excited about the overhaul.

“The stucco interrupts the flow of the landscape,” sophomore Amy Durham said. “I’m hoping that they’ll put more of the natural stonework back on so it doesn’t look so harsh against the landscape.”

Durham created a Facebook group titled, “I miss the old chapel.” The group’s membership has proliferated since its launch a week ago. As of Wednesday evening, 130 CSB/SJU students had joined the group.

“I can sympathize with (renovation opponents),” Mullin said. “Anytime a landmark is changed or altered it tugs at the heartstrings.”

“It’s certainly a long way from done,” he added.

The project represents the seventh major renovation the building has endured in the last 130 years.

Once completed, a piece of art will be placed in the chapel to encourage visitors to make the journey.

To protect the artwork, the building will automatically lock at night using an electronic locking system.

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