

GROTTO GRANNIES

PHOTO BY MICHAEL



Among thriving species in the garden are daylilies.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL

Lillian Lile, one of the six Grotto Grannies, removed fallen magnolia leaves as she helped clean up the group started at the old St. Joseph Infirmary's grotto. The cavernlike stone structure of the

Volunteers bring beauty to historic

By LINDA STAHL
The Courier-Journal

The gardens of the St. Joseph Infirmary Grotto are bloom again. Orange daylilies, yellow coreopsis, purple petunias and red snapdragons provide color and beauty.

Feathery ferns and astilbes catch the breeze.

The Grotto Grannies — a half-dozen determined women in their 70s and 80s — and donors from all over Jefferson County are responsible for the floral splendor now on display at the beloved stone grotto area just north of Eastern Parkway between Preston Street and Bradley Avenue.

The grotto was once a place for prayer on the grounds of the old St. Joseph Infirmary and its nursing school. The infirmary was demolished in the 1980s, and the school's dormitory was turned into what is now Lourdes Hall, a public housing development for the elderly. University Park Apartments also were built on the hospital grounds.

But the grotto, which dates to 1927, remained — a remnant of an era when people went there to pray for patients in the hospital.

The Grotto Grannies are volunteers from the St. Joseph Neighborhood Association who were concerned that the grotto had fallen on bad times and had become a hangout for vagrants and juveniles. It was littered with trash and piles of big, brown leaves shed by the magnolia trees that surround it.

Last year Doris Patterson, Ruth Gerlach, Lillian Lile, Oatsie Bragnola, Helen Spalding and Elizabeth Faust began to rescue the grotto from neglect with the help of spouses, children and friends. They removed the leaves, liquor bottles and other litter; dug up the compacted soil; and started growing things.

The grotto once featured the Stations of the Cross, statues, a fountain, pool and a playground.



Ruth Gerlach removed leaves from one of the plots. Volunteers replanted the grotto site after it was vandalized.

— the actual grotto — sitting at the end of a walled area. A stone bench faces the grotto, and walkways divide the space within the walls.

Early last summer the women planted the spaces between the walkways with dozens of begonias.

But their initial efforts were thwarted by vandals who tore out the plants, damaging them so badly they couldn't be replanted.

Then the women got donations of perennial plants and put them into the soil immediately after the begonia massacre.

But by last July, the perennials had vanished.

Despite the setbacks, the Grotto Grannies didn't give up. "We're going to keep going on," Lile promised.

"Doesn't it just look beautiful?" the 73-year-old Gerlach said last week as she and Lile worked in the garden, picking up magnolia leaves and plucking spent blossoms from

for them.

As Gerlach worked, she rattled off the names of nurseries and other businesses that donated more than \$1,000 worth of plants.

"Korffage, Ising, Wallitsch, Knaert, Winn-Dixie, Meijer's, Operation Brightside, Asseff's at the Haymarket. We had donations all the way from Dixie Highway to the East End to downtown."

"And then there was the mystery lady. . . . She planted the snapdragons. Someone from the apartments saw her, but we don't know who she is."

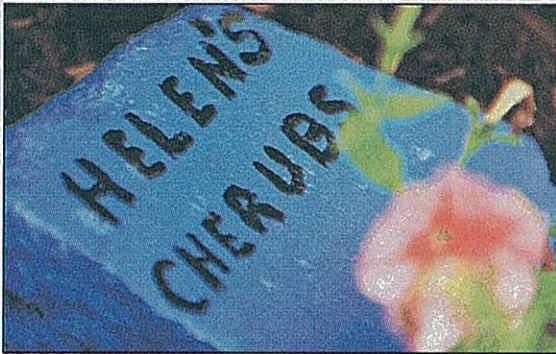
The Grotto Grannies were assisted last week by Dick Patterson (no relation to Doris), a widower from the neighborhood who remembers the nursing school and grotto from his youth.

"I dared two mice," both now dead, he said, walking to the spot where he had planted two plants in

But Gerlach has paid that serve as labels for sections. One reads "Peace of Heaven" and is wife tends. Another says "Oasis" and marks Bragnola's area.

Just about every day Doris stops by to check and pick up any litter. The gardens just a day or two to weed or rake. Ruth Gerlach to keep the group organized.

"This doesn't involve a just a lot of dedication," Ruth keeps us dedicated.



A personalized painted stone marker denotes one of the spots in the grotto.



Yellow coreopsis thrived in the shadow of the grotto on Eastern Parkway.

spot at old hospital

The Grotto Grannies have been aided by some younger volunteers, including Gail Linville, who lives in the neighborhood and stops at the grotto after work each day to do any watering that's needed.

Jackie Erhart, who oversees the city's community-garden program, has carried 40 pounds of mulch to the site for volunteers to use for weed control.

The place is definitely looking pretty again. And this spring the Grotto Grannies and the St. Joseph Neighborhood Association won historic-landmark designation for the

grotto from the Louisville Historic Landmarks and Preservation Districts Commission.

The Grotto Grannies aren't done yet.

They realize they can't restore the grotto to its former glory, but with donations that have come in, they plan to replace the long-missing sundial and place a stone angel high in the grotto, where a statue once rested.

Meanwhile, the women will continue to tend the gardens. Sedums and mums promise to bloom in the late summer and fall.

RES & HIGHLIGHTS

HER
rier-Journal

seball

of games in this
provided by league

scored twice and the Mariners also for the win-
ning Hayden
the Orioles, Brett
ism scored,
ingled.
ny Williams, Bri-
Osbourne
ged the Dia-
Diamond-
n, Matthew
ored, and Car-
ed.
Richard and
d twice, and

planted the sprouts with dozens of plants, damaged by the threat of volcanic activity. Then the volcanic soil permeated the plants. But by last year, the plants had disappeared. Despite the fact that the Grannies didn't want to keep going, "Doesn't it the 73-year-old garden, picking and plucking the nails on the and drag the they can sweat each's husband

Ruth Gerlach removed the actual grove end of a walled area that faces the grotto, and replanted the grove space within.

■ The Indians beat the Fairdale Cardinals 15-6.

Minors

■ Nick Fowler, Josh Calvert, Patrick Witt and Anthony Martin scored as the Indians defeated the Pirates 14-6.

■ Pitcher Shane Henderson had a double, a triple and five RBIs, and Corey Bryant also doubled and tripled, as the Indians downed the Pirates 14-4. For the Pirates, Jordan Broughton made a double play and Nathan Curry struck out five batters.

Majors

■ Justin Johnson and Matt Johnson each doubled, and Justin Summers and Jason Kitchen each had a home run as the Indians downed the Braves 15-5.

■ Bradley Thornberry pitched a one-hitter with 10 strikeouts and tripled as the Braves beat the Reds 8-4. Also for the Braves, Ronnie Kirschendorfer tripled, Mike Fowler doubled and homered, and Frankie Keen, Corey Kunkle and Jeffrey Higgins all doubled.

Babe Ruth

■ Zach Barnett doubled, tripled and had five RBIs while Josh Byrd singled.

former dormitory was turned into what is now Lourdes Hall, a public housing development for the elderly. University Park Apartments also were built on the hospital grounds.

But the grotto, which dates to 1927, remained — a remnant of an era when people went there to pray for patients in the hospital.

The Grotto Granaries are volunteers from the St. Joseph Neighborhood Association who were concerned that the grotto had fallen on bad times and had become a hangout for vagrants and juveniles. It was littered with trash and piles of big, brown leaves shed by the magnolia trees that surround it.

Last year Doris Patterson, Ruth Gerlach, Lillian Lile, Oatsie Brignola, Helen Spalding and Elizabeth Faust began to rescue the grotto from neglect with the help of spouses, children and friends. They removed the leaves, liquor bottles and other litter, dug up the compacted soil, and started growing things.

The grotto once featured the Stations of the Cross, statues, a fountain, a pool with goldfish, a sundial and rose gardens. But all that was long gone when the Granaries stepped in. What remains is an impressive, cavernlike stone structure.
