



Father Jack Topper (center), executive director of The Grotto, watches closely as Mark Roddy and Steve Mahoney prepare to move the damaged statue of the virgin Mary. Mahoney is a member of Iron Workers Local 29 and Roddy is a member of Bricklayers Local 1.

In the photos above, union members Steve Mahoney, Sam Moore, Mike Peters, Mark Roddy, and Shawn Lenczowski team up with Dan Schlappie, John Dilworth and Jason Dilworth of union contractor Schommer & Sons to rescue a statue of the virgin Mary damaged by vandals at The Grotto.

Union members, contractor, help rescue damaged statue at The Grotto

Union members and a union contractor volunteered to help rescue a marble statue of the virgin Mary that was severely damaged by vandals at The Grotto, a Catholic shrine and botanical garden located in Northeast Portland. The incident was reported to police on Nov. 29.

Vandals knocked Mary from its pedestal and removed her head. The faces of two small angels at the base of the statue also were damaged. The

head was found perched on a post on the West end of the 62 acre property near Northeast 87th Avenue and Beech Street.

Additionally, the vandals beheaded a statue of Joseph holding the baby Jesus. The head of baby Jesus was found a day later in a nearby motel Dumpster. Its eyes had been scratched out. The head of Joseph — the most ornate of the damaged sculptures — has not been recovered.

On Dec. 7, retired Iron Worker Steve Mahoney, unemployed Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Local 1 apprentices Sam Moore and Mike Peters, and Bricklayer apprenticeship instructor Mark Roddy teamed up with Dan Schlappie, John Dilworth, and Jason Dilworth of Schommer & Sons to pull the statue of Mary from the mud. The men brushed and hosed the statue clean before transporting it to a dry safe place until The Grotto decides how to proceed with its repair.

Bricklayers Apprenticeship Coordinator Shawn Lenczowski said Local 1, which trains bricklayers, tilers, and marblers, has members with the skills to do the repair work.

Schommer and Sons, a union contractor, donated the equipment to move the statue, which weighs more than 1,000 pounds. Both statues are from

the 1940s and are carved from Italian marble.

Rigging and transporting the statue of Mary took several hours.

"It's a delicate process. She's very brittle," said Mahoney, a 40-year member of Iron Workers Local 29.

Father Jack Topper, executive director of The National Sanctuary of Our Sorrowful Mother (the official name of The Grotto), told the Labor Press that the statues have been at The Grotto since the 1970s.

"These statues are just exquisite," Topper told the Catholic Sentinel. "Many people have said this is one of their favorite statues, so it's really so sad. What does this accomplish?"

Father Topper said vandalism of this magnitude has never occurred, except once 25 years ago when a much smaller statue was damaged.

A fund has been set up to help pay for the repair or replacement of the statues. For more information, call The Grotto at 503-254-7371. Crime Stoppers also is offering a cash reward of up to \$1,000 for information in the case. Leave a Crime Stoppers tip online at www.crimestoppersoforegon.com, text CRIMES (274637) and in the subject line put 823HELP, followed by tip, or call 503-823-HELP (4357) and leave tip information.

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