



The News Journal/FRED COMEGYS

Built in 1896, St. Joseph's at Providence Creek near Clayton is showing its age in some spots, but restoration work is under way.

Restoration of storm-damaged window renews efforts to preserve unique legacy of St. Joseph's at Providence Creek



A stained-glass window portraying Jesus looking up at a trio of angels was damaged by a storm in July. Artisan Cynthia Moulson of Middletown helped with the restoration work, along with Larry Ford of Smyrna. The window was made in 1896 and cost \$17,000 to repair.

History under glass

By GARY SOULSMAN
The News Journal

St. Joseph's at Providence Creek, one of the state's finest Italianate basilicas, regained some of its luster this week.

A 500-pound stained-glass window, which was destroyed last year in a violent July storm, was painstakingly repaired.

The window, which shows Jesus looking up at a hovering trio of angels, was reinstalled by stained-glass artisans Larry Ford of Smyrna and Cynthia Moulson of Middletown.

The wind damage and the \$17,000 needed to repair the 1896 church window was a wake-up call to Marc Ostroff, executive director of St. Joseph's at Providence Creek, a foundation that hopes to restore the basilica.

It's located on more than 200 acres north of downtown Clayton and is part of a historic site that's also known for its natural beauty.

Insurance on the church paid for the 4-foot-by-5-foot window's repair; Ostroff says. He also increased the amount of coverage on the property out of fear that something else might happen.

"We don't want to lose what we're hoping to renovate and restore," Ostroff says.

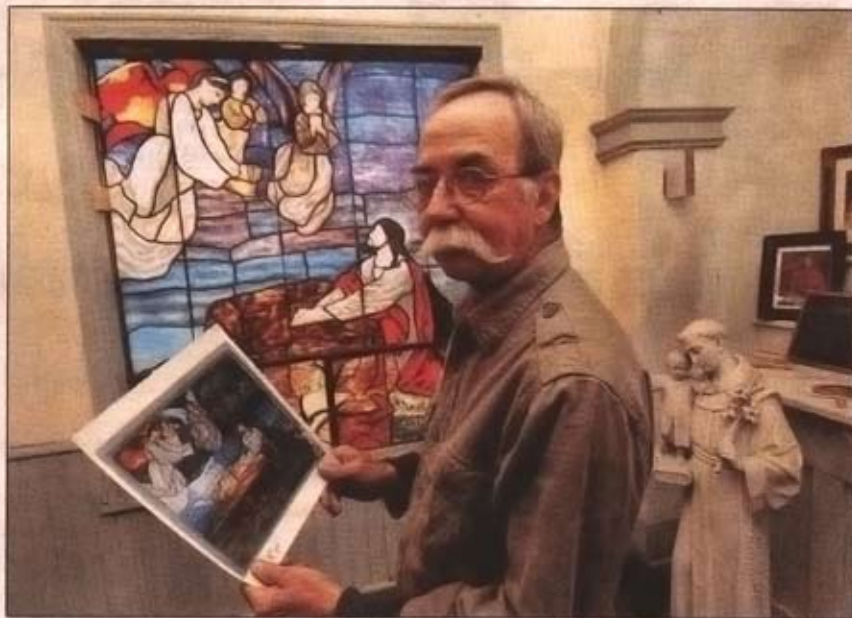
In the late 19th century, the St. Joseph's Society of the Sacred Heart opened an industrial school on the sprawling campus.

It was started by the Josephites to train black inner-city youths with few options in the decades after the Civil War and reconstruction. At one time the school had 15 buildings and educated up to 80 students. Various kinds of industrial and agricultural training took place, with students coming from as far as Chicago.

Saint Katharine Drexel of Philadelphia, who devoted her fortune to many causes, purchased the property for the Josephites. The school operated there until 1973.

After it closed, the property saw little use. Today there are six historic buildings on the site, three restored.

"Every so often people would dis-



Ford and Moulson used an old photo to re-create the storm-damaged window.



In 1997 a foundation was formed to determine the best way to preserve and restore the historic St. Joseph's site.

cover the land and the buildings on the campus and say this is a remarkable place, that something should be done," says Ostroff.

In 1997, a foundation was formed to explore how to preserve and restore the site. For Ostroff, the church is a

jewel. He hopes it will one day be a community center.

The foundation is raising \$19,000 to do an architectural assessment of the building to determine how to restore it and the likely cost. The land, also an amenity, includes a meadow, a forest, a pond and a creek. Ostroff says much of the open space will be preserved.

However, the foundation is committing some of the land to a charter school as well as housing for people 55 and older.

"I love this place," says Ostroff. "You can almost feel the presence of all the different people who've lived here through the years."

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