

Mount St. Mary's University to build grotto visitor center

Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg will construct a visitor center for the National Shrine Grotto of Lourdes this spring, providing new resources for the hundreds of thousands of people who annually visit the historic campus landmark.

Funding for the project was recently secured allowing the university to move ahead with the 5,000 square-foot facility. The two-story structure, designed to wrap around the existing 100-foot Pangborn Memorial Campanile, will house a large, multi-purpose conference room, a gallery and gift shop, outdoor gathering spaces for visitors, and administrative offices.

"We are extremely blessed to have this glorious national shrine on our campus, and soon we will have an extraordinary center to welcome our many visitors," said University President Thomas H. Powell.

The \$2.7 million project is funded primarily by donor gifts to the grotto, which will remain open during construction with regular hours and Masses held daily. Completion of the visitor center is expected in early 2013.

"The center will have so much to offer," said Bill Tronolone, director of the Grotto. "It will be equipped to host weddings, business meetings, conferences and retreats and will be a great destination for visitors year-round, even when the temperatures drop during the winter months."

The National Shrine Grotto of Lourdes welcomes more than 300,000 annual visitors from across the globe. It features one of the oldest American replicas of the Lourdes shrine in France, built about two decades after the apparition of Mary at Lourdes in

1858.