



# Religious experience welcomes visitors

BY VANESSA RENDERMAN

[vrenderman@nwitimes.com](mailto:vrenderman@nwitimes.com)

219.933.3241 | Wednesday, June 11, 2008

ST. JOHN | A span of St. John land that years ago was crowded with crop-picking migrant workers is gaining attention as a religious attraction.

And it's not even officially open yet.

At The Shrine of Christ's Passion, the tall fescue grass sways and leans against rust-colored boulders. Sun shines on a path of stamped concrete that branches off in quiet, foliage-rich nooks.

Along the way stand detailed bronze statues, nearly life-size, depicting the Stations of the Cross. Explanations and meditations recorded by veteran broadcaster Bill Kurtis will accompany each station.

Original music will play from the 180 speakers lining the trail, the tone adjusting to match the mood of the stations. A Chicago musician recorded thunder from a storm over Lake Michigan to be played near the scene of Christ's crucifixion, said Paul Anderson, visitor center and store manager at the shrine.

The shrine, located on the west side of U.S. 41 about a mile south of 93rd Avenue, is nearly complete. A few more statues need to be installed and the wiring needs to be finished before it can officially open.

The trail already has had its share of visitors, including a group from Japan that was in the area. People from every faith are invited to the shrine, which should be finished in four to six weeks, Anderson said.

"We want to touch everybody's hearts, not just Catholics," he said.

It is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Starting June 22, the shrine will be open from 1 to 4 p.m. on Sundays.

"I know it's not done, but they need to see it," he said.

Michael and Jane DiCosola, of DeMotte, walked the prayer trail Tuesday morning and said it is beautiful.

"It's something like you'd see in a retreat," Michael DiCosola said.

"The statues are so real," Jane DiCosola said.

The couple, who are Catholic, said they drove past the shrine many times as construction was under way and finally decided to stop in.

"If you didn't hear the traffic on (U.S.) 41, you would think you're back years ago," Jane DiCosola said.

Members of the Marian Wayside Foundation started the project seven years ago. The trail is free to visitors. Donations and the on-site gift shop will support the cost of maintenance, Anderson said.

Copyright © 2008 nwi.com