

SMWC and sisters unveil historic marker

'There is no place like Saint Mary-of-the-Woods'

By **SUE LOUGHLIN**
TRIBUNE-STAR

The historic architecture and peaceful setting of Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods, home to a college and the Sisters of Providence, have long drawn visitors to the 131-acre, wooded campus.

On Monday, representatives of the congregation, Saint Mary-

of-the-Woods College and the community gathered to unveil a sign marker for the Saint-Mary-of-the-Woods Historic District.

"There is no place like Saint Mary-of-the-Woods," said Sister Dawn Tomaszewski, general superior of the Sisters of Providence, during a program just before the marker's unveiling.

It is located outside the Gate-

house at the front entrance into the college.

The Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Historic District, a joint effort of the congregation and the college, is one of nine designated historic districts in Vigo County and has a total of 66 buildings, sites, structures and objects.

The district was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2017. The designation honors its architectural signif-

icance and educational and spiritual importance to the state and nation.

The college owns buildings that include Le Fer Hall, Guerin Hall and Hulman Hall; the Sisters of Providence own facilities that include the Church of the Immaculate Conception (Renaissance Revival architecture), Motherhouse/Providence Hall and Saint Anne Chapel.

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Sister Dawn Tomaszewski, general superior of the Sisters of Providence, and Brennan Randolph, interim president of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, stand beside a new sign marker for the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Historic District.



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Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College and the Sisters of Providence on Monday unveiled a marker for the Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Historic District, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2017.

Marker

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“We celebrate the legacy of the people who had the foresight to build such unique and awesome structures,” Tomaszewski said. “They have truly made Saint Mary-of-the-Woods a sight to behold!”

She added, “We have a sacred responsibility to care for this endowment, this legacy that has been passed on to us.”

Saint Mother Theodore Guerin founded the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods in 1840.

Tomaszewski highlighted the Church of the Immaculate Conception, constructed from 1886 to 1907, as well as the Saint Anne Shell Chapel, consecrated in 1876.

The designation as a historic district by the U.S. Department of the Interior “gives us the opportunity to access funds [including historic preservation funding] so we can continue to care for these beautiful buildings,” she said.

She noted that the Saint Anne Shell Chapel is in need of restoration; the floor is giving way and the walls are bowing, she said.

The Sisters of Providence have enlisted the help of Tommy Kleckner, director of Indiana Landmarks western regional office, “to help us restore the chapel to mint condition. We don’t want to lose it!”

Monday’s dedication of the historic marker is the culmination of years of work, Tomaszewski said.

“For me, this is a symbol ... an invitation to the community, to the Wabash Valley, to come see us,” she said. “We welcome your presence, we invite you to roam this campus to experience the architecture.”

People also can participate in Sisters of Providence programs, she said.

Brennan Randolph, interim president of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College, also spoke during the program.

He described it as a day “to celebrate the long legacy and history of this place and these grounds,” he said.

While some newer buildings have been added in recent years to the college, the goal was “making sure those buildings also reflect some of the older, historic ones on campus,” he said.



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Preserving historic buildings “is important to the college as well as the Sisters of Providence,” he said.

He noted that the Conservatory of Music, which dates back to 1911-1913, has been undergoing upgrades and restoration work. It features Beaux-Arts architecture.

Another speaker, Terre Haute Mayor Duke Bennett, said, “This is such a peaceful, wonderful and historical place.”

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods “clearly has such an impact on our entire community. It’s great to see positive things happening out here.”

The Saint Mary-of-the-Woods Historic District is the only historic district in Indiana with a college.

A joint committee has been established by the sisters and college to collaborate on promoting it.

Learn more at SMWhistoricdistrict.org. Sue Loughlin can be reached at 812-251-4235 or at sue.loughlin@tribstar.com. Follow Sue on Twitter at @TribStarSue.