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At Camden hospital, quake-damaged statue back in place

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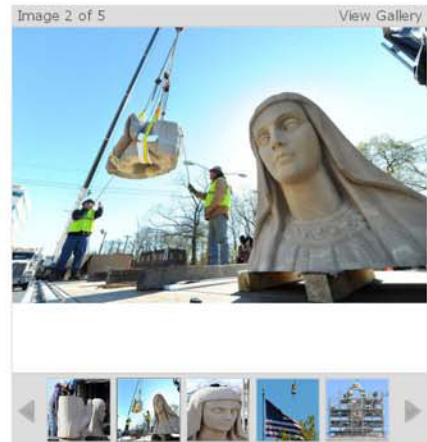
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After a five-month hiatus for repairs, the 30-foot Virgin Mary statue was returned Tuesday to its home atop Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center in Camden.

In a process that lasted six hours, the statue was hoisted in three parts to the hospital's highest point.

The Aug. 23 earthquake caused a shift of several inches in the middle section of the limestone statue, which resulted in a large vertical crack. Engineers tried to mend the 15-ton landmark on site without dismantling it, but the damage was too extensive.

In November, the George Young company of Swedesboro took it down and transported it to its facility. There, restorers from Krellick Conservation of Oreland repaired the cracks.



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Though the repairs took only three months, engineers had to wait for ideal weather - warmer than 50 degrees and without wind - to return the statue to its perch.

"It's very complicated to put her back up . . . there were a lot of environmental factors," said hospital spokeswoman Lauren Markin.

The total repair cost was \$150,000. An \$87,000 grant from the Heritage Fund of Catholic Health East, the hospital's parent company, and \$65,000 from public donations paid for the work, Markin said.

The leftover \$2,000 will be used for the statue's routine maintenance and cleaning, she said.

MidAtlantic Sign Services of Waterford donated a new illuminated halo, which will give the statue a brighter glow, Markin said.

The statue was given to the hospital by the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, N.Y., and erected in 1949 in six pieces. Since then, the statue has been one of Camden's most recognizable figures.

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