

Virgin Mary Statue atop Camden hospital removed for repairs

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The skyline will look a little empty during the next two months for those used to seeing the Virgin Mary statue atop Camden's Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital.

The upper half of the 30-foot-high statue was taken down in three sections Thursday by Krellick Conservation and transported to Swedesboro for repairs, hospital officials said.

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, hospital spokeswoman Lauren Ward said.

"Some chunks of limestone are missing," Ward said.

Repairs could take up to eight weeks, after which the statue will be reinstalled at Our Lady of Lourdes with additional mortar and structural support, she said.

The statue was given to the hospital by the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany, N.Y., and erected in 1949 in six pieces.

The Lourdes Health Foundation has established the Our Lady Fund to help pay for the repair. Ward did not know the full cost, but she said it would be much more than the \$100,000 the hospital's insurance will provide.

"We're really hoping the community helps out," she said.

The hospital is accepting contributions for the project at Lourdes Health Foundation, Our Lady Campaign, 1600 Haddon Ave., Camden, NJ 08103. Donations may be made online at www.lourdesnet.org/support/ourlady.php.

Contact staff writer Claudia Vargas

at 856-779-3917, cvargas@phillynews.com,

or [@InqCVargas](#) on Twitter.