Our Lady Keeping Watch

Campus Update

June 09, 2026

Our Lady has always stood watch over Ave Maria University. On June 4, it became quite literal.

Dubbed by some onlookers "The Assumption," on that day an eight-foot-tall gleaming white statue of Our Lady of Grace was lifted by crane onto the breezeway connector of St. John Paul II Hall and St. Teresa of Calcutta Hall, culminating a three-year project that was dreamed up by two of AMU's best dreamers at a St. Patrick's Day party. It's visible from all over campus and the town. Lights will be added soon to complete the installation.

The project was lengthy and arduous. Longtime Trustee Donna Bradt and her husband, Bill, with Founder and Chancellor Tom Monaghan, finalized of the plans at a St. Patrick's Day party in 2023, and Trustee Bradt generously agreed to fund it. The audacious aim was to put the statue on the roof of the connector, at five stories up the highest point on campus and especially visible from the student dorms.

"Bill and I have always felt that Ave Maria University is the epicenter of Marian culture and devotion," Trustee Bradt said. "Now her reign is more visible to all who come here. It's the genius of Tom. He envisioned that."

Problem is, the structure facing east isn't a roof--it's the top of a facade, and there's a large gap between that facade and penthouse structure that holds mechanical equipment. Engineers looked at the facade, and strategized different ways to mount the statue so that it could hold up to hurricane winds. Mounting on the facade wall was ruled out; a perch on the mechanical penthouse would push the statue too far back to be visible.

In the end, a steel bridge was fabricated by Salazar Machine & Steel in Immokalee to span the facade and the penthouse, and the statue was secured to an elevated base in the middle of the bridge, calculated to be high enough for proper site lines. The fiberglass statue was filled with concrete to provide stability in strong winds. There were designer and design changes, and permit delays and contractor snafus. Eventually the project became the responsibility of AMU Senior Manager of Special Projects Jason Sylvester, whose dogged perseverance paid off. The permit was issued June 1. The installation happened only three days later.

"Our Lady clearly wanted to be there," Trustee Bradt said.

Along with watching over the pending construction of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist Student Chapel, the statue will provide confirmation to incoming students in August and thousands more for years to come: Ave Maria University is truly Our Lady's university.

Bob Musselman Senior Director of Operations and Capital Projects

Read online for photos and videos:

https://alumni.avemaria.edu/news/our-lady-keeping-watch-1781033756862