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Visitors impressed with cathedral renovations

by Ryan Pivoney | Today at 4:03 a.m.



Ryan Pivoney/News Tribune photo: Docent Arnie Donovan discusses renovations to the Cathedral of St. Joseph with the Henson family Sunday, May 7, 2023, during an open house. The \$15 million renovation added several new pieces of art and addressed mechanical and accessibility issues within the building.

Renovations to the Cathedral of St. Joseph made it a more inviting space, open house visitors said. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Jefferson City hosted an open house at the cathedral Sunday afternoon, inviting anyone and everyone to tour the \$15 million renovations that had the church closed for the past year.

Kristin Roth and Dorothy Miller traveled to the Capital City from St. Louis to look around. Roth and Miller used to work as pastor administrators for the diocese in the 1980s. Miller said she was impressed by the tabernacle and area around the altar because "it just draws you in."

Roth, who last saw the cathedral in 2018 before retiring after 31 years with the church, agreed it was probably the biggest eye-catcher. "When you walk in, you're supposed to be drawn to the altar, and the background definitely draws you in," she said.

Miller said the renovated baptistry is inviting as well, adding "you can see it drawing new people in." The cathedral is the spiritual home for the more than 75,000 Roman Catholics who reside in the diocese, which covers 38 counties in Central and Northeastern Missouri. It's the mother church of all the parish's churches and is the seat of authority for the successor to the apostles, the bishop.

The renovation project addressed mechanical and accessibility issues within the structure, while also enhancing the church's spiritual functionality and hospitality, according to a news release. Some elements, such as bronze doors and reliefs, more stained glass and a new pipe organ, have yet to be installed.

Sunday's open house was the first public event since the cathedral was rededicated Friday. Jacob Luecke, communications director for the Diocese of Jefferson City, said hundreds have already been through to see the worship hall by attending mass and other recent events.

Approximately 800 people attended the 10 a.m. Sunday mass service, he said, adding there was also a Saturday mass and another Sunday morning mass. Luecke said many of the people who visited Sunday afternoon were people who hadn't been inside the cathedral for at least 15 months.

"We've had an awesome reaction from everyone who has come here and seen all the new artwork for the first time," Luecke said. "People have really had a positive response to it." Docents stood at various spots throughout the cathedral ready to explain what was new and provide details about changes.

Pat Biggerstaff stood near the ambry, where holy oils are kept. Oils meant to inspire longevity and strength were used to bless the cathedral altar during the rededication ceremony Friday, she said. Biggerstaff, who has been attending the church since 1992 and served as a docent Sunday, said the church used regular architects for structural elements of the renovation and Catholic architects for some of the religious aspects, like the ambry.

Ali Cockerhan, a docent standing under the cathedral oculus near the center of the room, said many local and state symbols were added to artwork throughout the cathedral. The mural scenes near the baptistry, for example, include fish native to Missouri, cardinals and bluebirds. The bishop in the scene is wearing a ring worn by W. Shawn McKnight, the current bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Jefferson City.

The cathedral oculus, where Cockerhan stood, was painted during the renovation to add "IHS," a common symbol for Jesus that refers to his name in Greek. "Everything is very symbolic," she said.

Luecke said the mosaic art throughout the cathedral has been getting a lot of attention. A mosaic piece titled "Christ, Ruler of All" hangs above the cathedral's main entrance. Luecke said it's meant to remind visitors of Christ's influence as they exit the house of worship into the community.

Mary Wiseman, who attends St. Peter Catholic Church, said the sparkly mosaic additions to the area behind the central crucifix caught her eye. The wooden walls also make the space feel less bare, she said. Wiseman said she has visited the church many times since moving to Jefferson City nearly 50 years ago. The cathedral was modern when she moved to the area, she said, but she likes the new colors and renovation more.

Don Antweiler, a retired priest from Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, recalled attending the cathedral's first dedication in 1974 and said Sunday he wanted to see the updates. He was struck by the tabernacle, altar and a ribbon of Bible excerpts that lines the worship hall. Antweiler said it reminds him of gathering, breaking bread and praying with others.

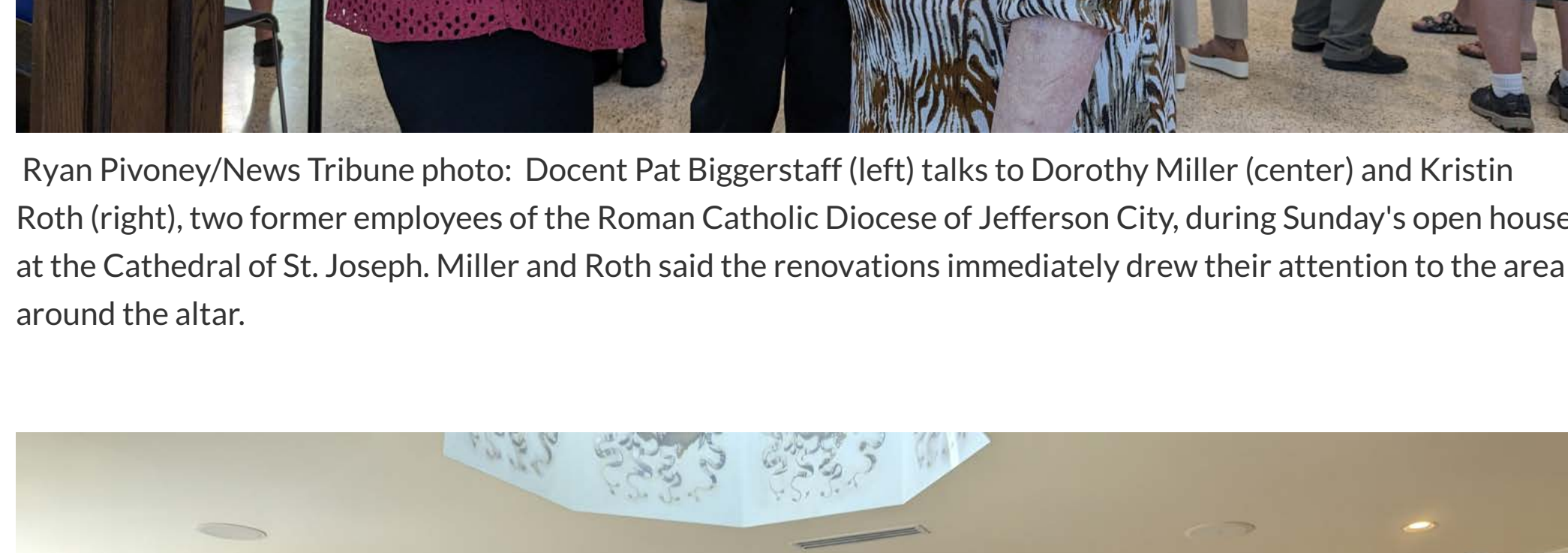
"That just kind of sums up a lot of stuff that just circles this whole place and what we're here to do," he said.



Ryan Pivoney/News Tribune photo: Docent Ali Cockerhan (left) talks to visitor Carol Hinchie, of Fulton, about renovations to the Cathedral of St. Joseph during Sunday's open house event. The \$15 million renovation added several new pieces of art and addressed mechanical and accessibility issues within the building.



Ryan Pivoney/News Tribune photo: Docent Pat Biggerstaff (left) talks to Dorothy Miller (center) and Kristin Roth (right), two former employees of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jefferson City, during Sunday's open house at the Cathedral of St. Joseph. Miller and Roth said the renovations immediately drew their attention to the area around the altar.



Ryan Pivoney/News Tribune photo: Bill Hinchie (left) discusses updates to the baptistry area with docent Kim Brester (right) during Sunday's open house at the Cathedral of St. Joseph.

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