

Cathedral restoration continues

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Restoration work to preserve the original artwork of Ozias Leduc, at St. Ninian Cathedral, continued this past summer.

Work was done on the paintings of St. Matthew and St. John the Baptist and it's the hope of the St. Ninian's Art Restoration Committee (SNARC), work can continue in the following summer seasons.

"We did two this year because of the donation we received," SNARC chair Ernst Schuegraf said. "If we can do two Saints every year, then we would be in good shape."

And while that may sound simple enough, it certainly isn't, whether talking financially, time-wise or with the work itself.

"It's difficult," Schuegraf said, talking about the latter.

"The cathedral is flaking so badly because, in the last repainting in 1989, there was latex in the paint and all the paint underneath was oil paint. Latex and oil expand at different rates and in the change in temperatures, humidity will eventually, 25 years later, lead to flaking.

"To make this even worse, there was a steam leak in the heating system that wasn't discovered [for quite a while] and it made the plaster soft.

"You see what the problems are for the restorers. If you see the flakes and they're close to the apostles and they want to bring back what was underneath, before they can do that they have to glue that flake back, then they can take the paint off."

Schuegraf went back further to explain that, after the Leduc did his work in the cathedral in 1903, overpainting started to cover and distort his work, especially work done in 1957.

"The cathedral originally had a big window behind the altar which you can see when you look from the outside," he said.

"So that was what he [Leduc] was working in; he had the light coming in from the front and that is what he used in all the paintings. When they did the overpainting, restorations or whatever they called them, re-painting at that time, they just painted this over.

"So a lot of the colours you see are not the originals; so what these restorers are doing is bringing back some of the elements of the original paintings."

Schuegraf stressed the significance of having Leduc work as part of the cathedral's attractiveness and that, perhaps, the artist and his work isn't as appreciated as much as it should be in this part of Canada.



Restorers Michelle Gallinger (left), Brittany Houghton and Anne Sinclair working in St. Ninian Cathedral in late August.
Richard MacKenzie

"For French Canadians, Leduc is one of the more important painters," he said.

"I do the occasional tourist guiding of the cathedral and they're all impressed when they

see this, especially the French Canadians.

"The National Gallery has a

lot of his non-religious paintings and I should probably stress this; this is the only church with Leduc paintings east of Montreal, which exists. There is a very nice church in Shawinigan that was completely restored, about 10 years ago, and three other spots and that is it. He must have painted many churches here, in Eastern Canada, as well as in the New England states, and we're still the only one."

Schuegraf said the restorers have informed him to finish the work would take around eight years, especially considering — for temperature, ventilation and busyness reasons — it has to be done in the summer months. Not only that, but that it, really, needs to be done in that time frame.

"They said it might take six to eight years to finish this work because every year it gets worse; the flaking will continue and, after that time, it may not be able to be restored at all," he said.

He said if someone wants to make a contribution to the work, they should contact the parish office at 902-863-2338.

He added, the committee may make an application to a national funding agency for art restoration but, often, those funding grants come back with strict guidelines dictating how the work should proceed.

THANK YOU

Thank You to all those volunteers and participants who made the 3rd annual Chip in for St. Martha's Golf Tournament a success.

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The team of Iain Arseneau (left), Ron Arseneau, Harold LeBrun and Tim David took home the first place trophy from the 3rd Annual Chip in for St. Martha's Golf Tournament held Sept. 8.