

Statue of Pope John Paul II unveiled at City of Hope

By James Wagner, Staff Writer

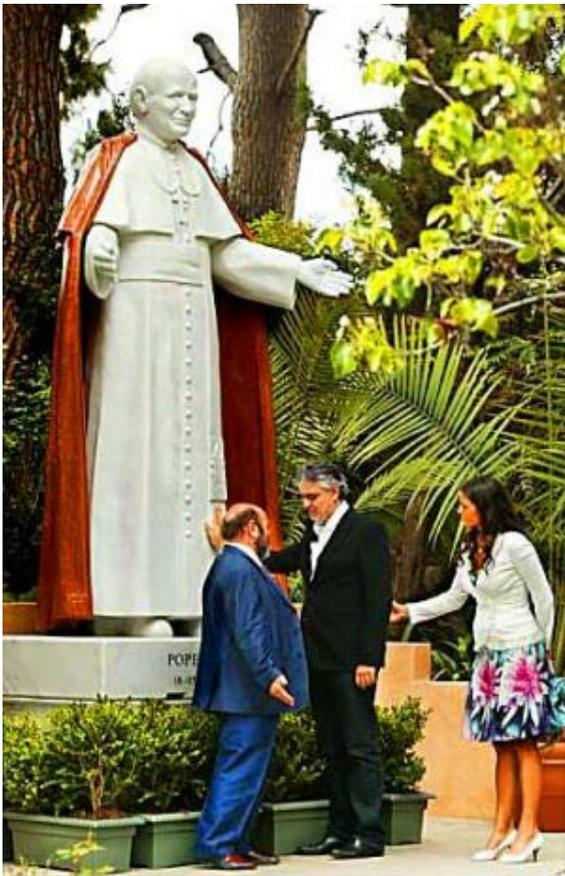
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DUARTE - On April 2, 2005, Pope John Paul II, a longtime sufferer of Parkinson's disease, died at 84 years old. But walk the gardens of City of Hope and the pontiff, smiling and with arms wide open, looks alive and well - albeit, in white marble.

Photo Gallery: Andrea Bocelli performs at City of Hope for statue dedication

A statue of the former head of the Catholic Church was dedicated Monday at a private ceremony in City of Hope's Rose Garden for nearly 400 people, which included donors, medical staff, a famous singer and, of course, some religious figures.

Renowned tenor Andrea Bocelli



World-renowned singer Italian tenor Maestro Andrea Bocelli right, touches the surface of Pope John Paul II statue, with Italian sculptor Giuliano Ottaviani Monday, June 8, 2009 at dedication ceremony for Pope John Paul II statue, donated to City of Hope by Gaetano D'Aquino family. The 9-ft. travertine marble statue was generously donated by the family of wine importer and longtime City of Hope supporter Gaetano D'Aquino along with other members of the local Italian-American community.

(SGVN/Staff Photo by Walt Mancini/SXCity)

performed. Monsignor Vittorio Formenti, a Vatican statistician who flew in from Rome, blessed the statue.

Nurses and doctors took a break from work to sneak a peak or listen to the music.

The statue is a towering addition to a medical center that hopes to not only treat cancer, but also give its patients hope.

A Buddha sits in a garden at the center. There's also a synagogue. A statute of the Virgin of Guadalupe stands near the new papal one.

Local businessman Gaetano D'Aquino, who spearheaded the donation of the statue and whose sister suffered from cancer, wanted to give the City of Hope patients a symbol of caring.

"When people are sick, they need help," said D'Aquino, the president of Duarte-based Italian food and wine importer, D'Aquino Imports Co., Inc. "They need faith."

About a year ago D'Aquino approached his friend, Michael A. Friedman, president and CEO of City of Hope, with the idea of donating a statue of the Pope John Paul II to the medical center.

D'Aquino, himself a fan of the former pope, commissioned Giuliano Ottaviani, a sculptor based near Milan, Italy. It took Ottaviani four months to make the 9-foot, 14,000-pound marble statue, which was shipped from Italy to the port of Long Beach in a crate and mounted at the medical center last week.

A handful of donors, mostly from the Italian-American community, donated nearly \$100,000 for the statue.

Sister Regina Marie, a Carmelite nun from the nearby Santa Teresita Medical Center, attended the ceremony with three other nuns. She said she met the former pope in 1995 in Rome and stood inches from him. The statue, she said, is a "wonderful" depiction of the man some consider a saint.

"He was a herald of hope, always," Marie said, as attendees snapped pictures before the statue. "He was not afraid to let the world see him suffer.

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