

SMC War Memorial—Our Lady of the Oaks

By Andrea A. Firth



SMC War Memorial

Photo Andrea A. Firth

On Sunday, November 11th, Veteran’s Day will be celebrated at war memorials around the country. Unknown to many Lamorinda residents, Saint Mary’s College of California (SMC) in Moraga is the site of a World War II shrine—Our Lady of the Oaks. Tucked away in a grove on the Saint Mary’s campus is a memorial to the 1,427 alumni who served in the military during World War II. Located a short walk past Saint Mary’s Stadium down a tree-lined, gravel path is a painted wood sign for the memorial. Off to the left is a clearing with a statue of the Virgin Mary and a plaque listing the names of 21 alumni who lost their lives during the war.

Originally called Our Lady of the Grove, the memorial’s name evolved to Our Lady of Grace and subsequently Our Lady of the Oaks. In the nineteen-seventies, a fallen tree de-

stroyed the memorial, but the statue and sign were soon replaced. Today, Our Lady of the Oaks is a quiet, shady sanctuary with two stone benches nearby just right for a moment of reflection.

Saint Mary’s connection to the veterans of World War II runs deep and dates back to 1941 when the college was selected as one of four pre-flight training facilities for Navy pilots. From 1942 to 1946, the SMC campus was filled with young Navy men including the late president Gerald R. Ford who served as an instructor at the pre-flight school. A Navy Memorial Bench sits just outside the Hearst Gallery on campus to honor the young airmen who attended the flight school. In addition, a plaque honoring the SMC alumni who served in World Wars I and II and the Vietnam Conflict is located in the arcade outside the Chapel near the gallery.



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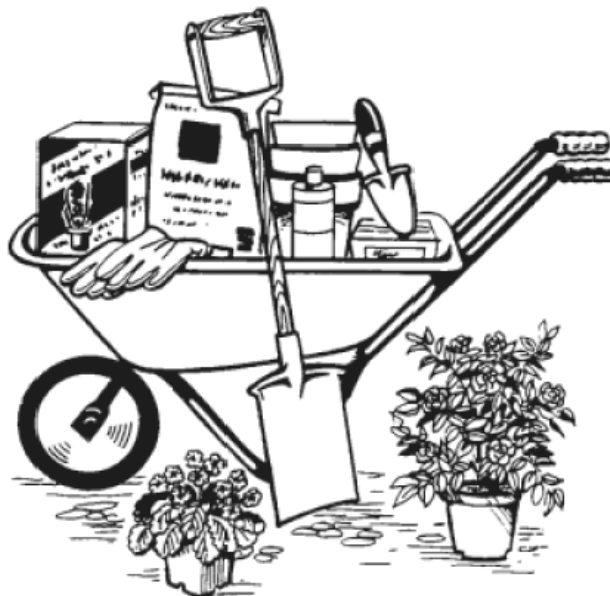
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