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What lurks beneath Saint Mary's College?

By Vera Kochan



SMC's Brother David Caretti with orb hovering near his chest Photo Vera Kochan

On a rather balmy, late October evening, Moraga's Saint Mary's College offered a free event sponsored by the SMC Alumni Office, calling it "Brews & Boos." The title is rather self-explanatory for an experience that begins in the campus' The 1928 Pub and features a tour of the mysterious underground catacombs, a few nights before Halloween.

A complimentary and hearty nacho bar with a no-host beverage bar was available, possibly to fortify the participants who just might have naively signed up to take a one-way tour into the bowels of SMC, never to be heard from again.

Alumni Engagement Services and Events Assistant Director Philip Goodwin and Program Manager Bailey Minardi coordinated the evening's festivities while Brother David Caretti took groups of 10 people at a time down into the catacombs. What better way to instill trust

in unsuspecting souls, than to follow a man of the cloth into the unknown?

The last time anyone had gone "down below" was in 2019, before it was suspended due to COVID restrictions - at least that's what we were told (wink-wink). Nearly 100 years old, the catacombs are part of the original 1928 construction of the campus.

As Caretti led the first group of explorers from the pub, past The Chapel, to the inevitable entrance of what by now is assumed to be Hell's Gate, the jovial chatter of the party morphed into an almost nervous, giggly hush. For years, rumors have abounded with tales of students sneaking their way down into the haunted depths, only to become lost for days, and finally emerging as babbling fools thanks to their macabre experiences. Adding to that, is the undocumented theory that the catacombs once acted as a subterranean cemetery for SMC's deceased clergy members before their remains were transplanted (so to speak) to their final resting place in Napa.

Once all of the "tourists" had descended to the netherworld, it was obvious even to a layman, that the vast network of tunnels house nothing more than interconnecting pipes and cables that service the college's electrical and plumbing needs. One might think this all a bit anticlimactic, but the sight was impressive none-the-less. The main tunnel travels back toward the direction of the Chapel and beyond, appearing to go on for an eternity and giving one the impression of a subway system minus the train. There was evidence of unintelligible graffiti running rampant on the walls (which may give credence to the tales of students left down there too long and emerging as blathering morons).

Spooky? Yes. It is not a place anyone would want to spend alone for a long period of time, left to the mercy of an over-active imagination. If taken at face value, the catacombs are merely an infrastructural necessity meant to keep SMC functioning comfortably.? However, how does one explain a photo of a white orb hovering in front of Caretti?



Back end of main tunnel Photo Vera Kochan

Reach the reporter at: vera@lamorindaweekly.com

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