

PLAYERS FOR HEALING IN STATUE FIX

Pokémon Go gamers raise funds to help at 'nice' site

BY RACHEL UDA
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A Manorville chapel is getting some extra help after one of its statues of Jesus was defaced, with funds streaming in from parishioners, area residents and an unlikely source — Pokémon Go players.

Vandals smashed the face of the life-size statue outside the Shrine of Our Lady of the Island in Manorville Saturday night — only weeks before thousands of Long Islanders will walk the Stations of the Cross there to commemorate Good Friday.

Suffolk County Crime Stoppers is offering a \$5,000 reward for information leading to an arrest in the case.

David Ringhiser, 37, of Mastic regularly plays Pokémon Go at the shrine, which he said has several PokéStops — locations where players collect virtual items in the game. He created an online fundraiser Wednesday night to help fix the statue and shared it in Facebook groups for local Pokémon Go players.

"A lot of us play Pokémon Go there to load up on items. I think they are great to let us

drive around or walk around there with no issues," Ringhiser wrote in the description of the GoFundMe page.

Some schools, libraries or other public places, also considered hot spots for the augmented reality game, have been less welcoming to players who mill around their property, but not the Shrine of Our Lady, Ringhiser said.

"So I thought, why not help them out in a time of need?" he said.

Jennifer Rymer, 27, of Port Jefferson Station, donated \$25 Thursday. She has played at the Manorville location only a couple of times but still wanted to help.

"I'm not really a religious person, but because the place is so nice and the Pokémon Go community is pretty into keeping the community safe and clean, I thought I'd give something," Rymer said.

More than \$2,200 has been collected, mostly from people who play the game, Ringhiser said.

The Rev. Pete D'Abele, an administrator at Shrine of Our Lady, said he hasn't noticed the players, who walk the grounds with their eyes trained on their phones or drive slowly through the parking lot. So he was surprised when Ringhiser stopped by at the church Thursday morning.

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— Jennifer Rymer

"It's good," D'Abele said. "I guess he wanted to pay it forward."

Several people have also donated through the church's website and a couple have delivered checks, including a group of local firefighters. D'Abele said he's not yet sure how much it will cost to fix the statue.

Ringhiser hopes to raise \$5,000 for the repair.

"It's a beautiful place and right now they have a garbage bag covering the statue. They shouldn't have something like that there," Ringhiser said. "We're just trying to help."



A statue of Jesus at Shrine of Our Lady of the Island in Manorville.

Search for Beach Hut replacement blocked

BY RICK BRAND
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Suffolk Comptroller John Kennedy has obtained a temporary court order blocking officials from picking a concessionaire for three county beaches to replace Beach Hut, which pleaded guilty to shortchanging Suffolk and Babylon Town on sales tax and fees.

State Supreme Court Justice David Riley issued a show-cause order Thursday stopping Suffolk from moving forward with its bidding process until a March 26 hearing on the dispute.

The county parks department is looking to select operators for concessions at Smith Point, Cupsogue and Meschutt county beaches.



Comptroller John Kennedy

Kennedy brought the lawsuit after the parks department refused to comply with his sub-

poena demanding that officials turn over all records connected to the bidding process as part of a comptroller performance audit. Parks officials also were seeking to quash the subpoena in court.

Kennedy is also seeking a declaratory judgment authorizing him to move forward with the audit. Kennedy is seeking documents and real time access to the deliberative process.

Aides to County Executive Steve Bellone say Kennedy only can conduct an audit after the bidding process is complete.

The county originally had hoped to choose new concessionaires by March 31, then sought to move up the selection date to Friday after Kennedy sought to hire an out-

side lawyer. Parks officials are looking to complete a contracts by May 1 so the concessions can begin operations on Memorial Day weekend.

The Babylon Town Board, which also fired Beach Hut, voted in a special meeting Friday to approve 20-year contracts with replacement concessionaires at four town parks and beaches. Town officials say the new contracts will boost revenue to a total of \$104,000 for the coming year.

For the oceanfront Cedar and Overlook beaches, Babylon chose Island Time Hospitality Group, which also operates Dublin Deck and Harbor Crab in Patchogue.

Where Beach Hut paid the town a flat fee of \$20,000 a

year, the new contract calls for \$50,000 in the first year and \$70,000 annually by the end of the agreement. The new operator also will pay 7.5 percent on gross revenue over \$60,000 for the entire contract.

For Tanner Park in Copiague and Venetian Shores in Lindenhurst, the town selected the firm Katch at Babylon Beaches, which also operates T.J. Finley's in Bay Shore.

Where Beach Hut paid \$24,000 as a flat fee, the new operator will pay \$54,000 the first year, decreasing to \$43,000 by the end of the agreement.

While Beach Hut was paying 7 percent on gross revenue over \$60,000, Katch will pay 7.15 percent the first year and 10 percent by the end of the contract.