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Coming Home: New, Improved JFK Statue to be Unveiled Oct. 16 as Part of Homecoming Festivities

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(Editor's Note: The statue will be lowered by crane to its spot in front of UD's Kennedy Union starting at approximately 9 a.m. on Thursday, Oct. 8, and then it will be unveiled at 6:45 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 16, for alumni and students as part of Homecoming festivities.)

**COMING HOME: NEW, IMPROVED JFK STATUE
TO BE UNVEILED OCT. 16 AS PART OF HOMECOMING FESTIVITIES**

DAYTON, Ohio — He's shed a few pounds, is sporting a bronzed look — and he's standing tall again. This time, he's built to last.

The University of Dayton has restored a beloved 8-foot-tall abstract sculpture of John F. Kennedy and the eternal flame by recasting the crumbling cement statue in bronze. Originally installed in 1964 and removed last year during the renovation of Kennedy Union, it'll return to its post in the center of campus just in time for Homecoming.

"It'll have a more definite presence, and it will last for at least another couple thousand years," says John Leon, a Cincinnati sculptor who was commissioned this spring to restore the campus monument.

The \$33,000 restoration has captured the attention of Caroline Kennedy, who is sending UD President Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M., a letter of appreciation to read at the unveiling ceremony.

"I know it was a landmark at the entrance of Kennedy Union for over 30 years, and I am so pleased that the University has chosen to return the sculpture to its original home," she writes. "My father took pride in being elected the first Catholic president of the United States, and I think it's fitting that he be honored here — at Ohio's largest Catholic university. ... It is my hope that this beautiful piece will remain here for generations of students to come — as a reminder of President Kennedy's service to this country, and his commitment to the arts and preservation."

Shortly after Kennedy's assassination, UD students lobbied the administration to name

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the newly built student union after Kennedy, and UD officials thought a sculpture of Kennedy and the eternal flame would be a suitable symbol to memorialize the slain president.

Sculptor William Thompson recommended that the piece be cast in bronze, but, because of University budget concerns, created it out of a less-expensive mixture of cement, crushed marble chips and steel rods. He died in 1995.

As part of the restoration, Leon consulted with Henry Setter, a sculptor and former UD professor who knew Thompson and occasionally patched and repaired the statue over the last three decades. Setter, who teaches sculpture at the University of West Georgia but plans to return to Dayton to participate in the unveiling ceremony, shared photos of the original statue that helped Leon recreate a hand and other missing pieces out of clay.

David Klahn Foundry in Athens, Ohio, cast the statue in 22 pieces that were then welded together. The piece weighs a sleek 600 pounds — a fraction of its original weight. It will sit on an 800-pound slab of granite adorned with a plaque inscribed with the words of Kennedy: “The life of the arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction, in the life of a nation, is very close to the center of a nation’s purpose — and is a test of the quality of a nation’s civilization.”

Does Leon have any doubts that the sculpture will stand the test of time? “It should probably be waxed once a year to preserve the color. It might only last a thousand years, instead of two thousand, if it weren’t waxed.”

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For media interviews, contact **Joe Belle**, assistant vice president for student development, at (937) 229-3317, **John Leon** at (513) 777-1862 and **Henry Setter** at (770) 836-6482 or 832-8986.