

## The history of St. Margaret's cross on the hill

**P**alm Desert and other valley residents are used to seeing the brightly lighted cross atop a hill behind St. Margaret's. It's been there for almost two decades.

Placing the inspirational cross on the hill originally, was the idea of a young College of the Desert student, Mark Stembler. He built, wired, and installed his cross with the help of friends in December of 1981. Immediately, churches, city halls and businesses received hundreds of phone call from valley residents and visitors.

Sadly, the cross was an inspiration for only four months, until a wind storm blew it down. Immediately, a committee was formed with Mrs. Evelyn Young, Ed Mullins, Fr. Brad Hall, Millie Bartow, Ralston Calvert, and others. They started raising funds through donations to replace the original cross. Young Stembler's simple idea became a complicated cause. Who owned the land?

What permits were necessary? How to get permanent electricity? Who would build and erect the new one? In the beginning, electricity came from a nearby house and was paid for by Stembler.

Palm Desert National Bank opened an account for donations. Due to it's proximity to the church, St. Margaret's and Father Hall became involved, success at last! Stembler, his friends, and businesses worked to-

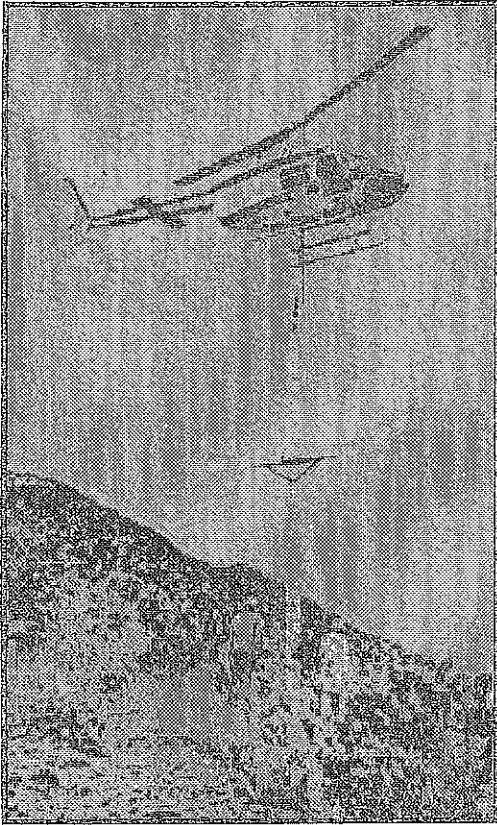
gether to obtain a construction company and helicopter service to build and carry the cross up to its new site very near the original shaft. Success was a fleeting thing.

On that Good Friday, witnesses were appalled when the helicopter lowered the cross into the new shaft, redwood begin to split and fall broken from the base.

Again, even greater forces joined to repair and replace the cross, hopefully in time for Easter Sunday. Stembler and friends spent the entire night digging a new shaft. A construction company spliced and bolted the broken cross and again, the helicopter gently lowed it into it's new position. It would stand lighted for Easter Sunday.

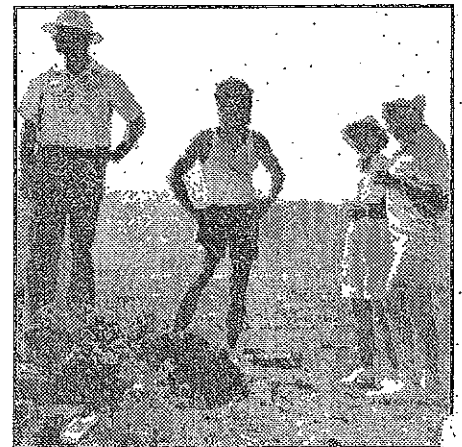
The 32 foot high white cross had 42 lights and its white paint was impregnated with reflective glitter to increase visibility during darkness. It had a light sensitive switch which automatically lights the cross at dusk.

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*A helicopter attempts to lower the cross into a hole. But the cross snapped during the try.*

*Helicopter pilot Don Landells (right) discusses with Mark Stembler the reasons the cross broke near its base as it was lowered into the ground.*



*Fr. Brad Hall, John McCormick, Marian McGill and Ralston Calvert near the cross site.*

*history of the cross continued...*

By 1996 the cross had been blow down a number of times and patched so much that it was clear to Fr. Brad Hall that the old cross needed to be replaced. Fr. Brad asked Frank Trane if he would design and build a new cross.

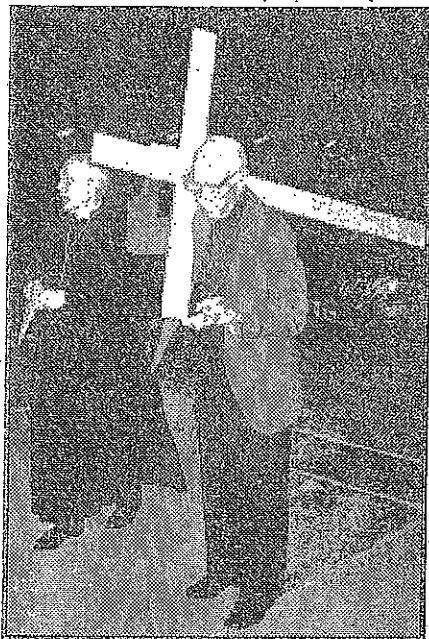
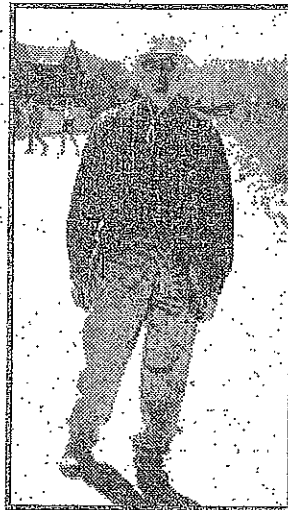
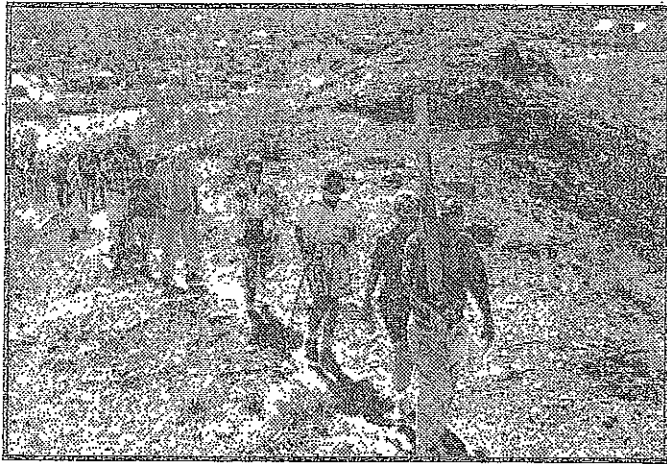
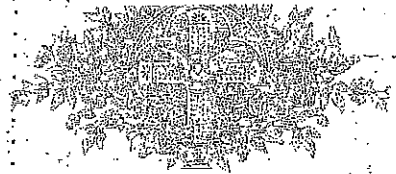
Frank had a mast builder in Newport Beach make the cross pre-assembled, 30 feet high, 16 feet across, with 6 inch square aluminum that would withstand 100 knot

winds. The cross also had 39 fluorescent lights (the number of lashes Jesus received on the cross).

After the cross was built Steve Jones sent a flatbed truck to Orange County to pick it up. When it arrived in the desert, Steve and five other men assembled the cross pieces, and had it up in 3 to 4 hours. A 3 foot piece of the old cross was saved and will someday be displayed along with St. Margaret's

other mementos.

The cross sits above St. Margaret's due to the vision of Mark Stembler and the hard work of others. It is a symbol of peace and the brotherhood of man.



*Stations of The Cross processions were offered twice on Good Friday- a morning hike to our hillside cross (and a little fellow who couldn't make it all the way) followed by an evening service on the Patio.*



*Parishioners and Fr. Certain at the cross on Ash Wednesday.*