

# Supporters of Duns Scotus hope to save friary

By Tim Smith  
staff writer

The friary at Duns Scotus may yet be saved.

Supporters of the friary are seeking an alternative to selling the 110-acre site to developers who want to build a conference center and golf course.

In the wake of the Franciscan Mothers' Club's spirited protest to block a reported \$9 million sale, discussions have taken place between Duns Scotus real estate agent and D'Eire University, which leases part of the former seminary for its American-Japan International College, said the Rev. Daniel Havron, a Franciscan Provincial Councilor.

According to Havron, the very recent talks have centered on D'Eire University buying a majority of the 230,000-square-foot facility — all but the existing chapel and friary, where the 25 Franciscan fathers now live. Others also have stepped forward with an interest, he added.

"They (D'Eire University) are interested in the place" and in having "further dialogue" about a deal,

Havron said. That, he added, might "change the entire picture."

But for Duns Scotus supporters, the picture remains bleak. Havron on Monday said negotiations to sell the entire 61-year-old landmark and surrounding grounds for \$9 million to Southfield developer LoPatin & Co. and an out-of-state company remain "on the front burner."

SOURCES CLOSE to the scene confirmed that the second company involved in the proposed purchase is Florida-based Dorai Corp. and not a New York firm as was earlier reported.

That sale, prompted by low staffing and financial problems at Duns Scotus, could take place by the end of December, Havron said.

Havron said the developers intend to keep the distinctive-looking structure intact for use as a conference center, with much of the 110-acre site being transformed from its current peaceful setting into a 9-hole golf course.

Meanwhile, members of the Franciscan Mothers' Club said there have been rumors that Duns Scotus

***'If it's God's will (to save the chapel), I'm sure our prayers will be answered. If it's to be sold, then it will be sold.'***

— Rachel Hund  
Franciscan Mothers Club

would face the wrecking ball if sold, or at least turned into upscale condominiums. Havron scoffed at those rumors.

"We had that offer years ago from developers, to buy the land and tear it down," Havron said. "If we knew that was their plan we wouldn't go any further with it."

The latter wouldn't bother those who have come out in full force to oppose any sale, including members of the Franciscan Mothers' Club volunteer group, which recently has collected nearly 4,000 anti-sale signatures onto petitions.

ACCORDING to club president Rachel Hund and member Vicki Garland, the main objective of the

protest is to at least save the chapel and friary's living quarters.

"That's all we're fighting for," Hund said, later adding that the 675-member club will continue its petition drive until a final decision is made. "If it's God's will (to save the chapel), I'm sure our prayers will be answered. If it's to be sold, then it will be sold."

Garland said the club's aim is to "show how much Duns Scotus is wanted and needed."

About 3,000 people a week attend religious services, while many needy people are assisted by its retreat center, particularly during the holidays.

Hund and Havron said the club's

efforts have stirred up public awareness in support of the efforts to save Duns Scotus.

"They say it's sad, it's terrible," Hund said. "That's like a historic place. No matter who you talk to, they say, 'Oh yeah, Duns Scotus, I love that.'"

HAVRON SAID public reaction to the club's protest surprised him. "It's nice to see that people care so much."

The petition drive also has resulted in companies calling Duns Scotus to inquire about purchasing the property, Havron said.

Meanwhile, Havron added that D'Eire University has been interested for more than a year in buying the now-closed college which is adjacent to the chapel/friary. It was closed in 1986.

The university's dean, William Poffenberger, could not be contacted Monday and Tuesday.

When asked whether there was any way the pending deal with LoPatin and Dorai Corp. could be fine-tuned to at least rescue the facility's chapel and friary, Havron said it

was doubtful whether such an arrangement would be compatible enough to work.

"THE PROBLEM is, a conference center would draw a certain class of people," Havron said. "We have a lot of people who come here who are lower income families who depend on us for food, clothes and other sustenance."

"It wouldn't be compatible for us to be here if some big business also had a convention here."

According to Havron last week, Duns Scotus representatives and those for the lined-up buyer (LoPatin-Dorai) would meet this month to discuss terms of a conditional deal.

A nine-month period to close the deal would follow, Havron said.

He added that Duns Scotus would vacate its quarters by late 1992, but that the Franciscans would maintain their "presence" in Southfield and surrounding communities.

"The most important thing is that we remain in the Archdiocese of Detroit and continue to minister to the people," Hund said, adding that a possibility is moving mass to nearby St. Michael's Church.

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