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BUSINESS

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LIVING OFF THE PAST

THIRD GENERATION OF GRACIANOS GROW THE FAMILY RESTORATION BUSINESS

During the early years of the remodeling and restoration business he founded in 1916, Italian immigrant Joseph Graciano carried a notepad listing finances in his shirt pocket, including accounts, expenses, contacts.

He would drive almost anywhere from Pittsburgh—to Buffalo, N.Y.; New York City; Columbus, Ohio; and Washington, D.C.—to find clients and work.

It was well before the construction of the U.S. interstate highway system or even elaborate state highways, so he'd carry up to five spare tires for emergencies. Once at his destination, he worked on small buildings—churches, schools, banks, residences.

His perseverance paid off, as the small company has continued to grow, weathering the Depression, the transfer of control to sons Richard and Joe, the boom and bust of the region's steel industry and the painful shift from a manufacturing-driven economy to a service-based one.

Today, there's hardly an old building in the region that Graciano hasn't touched. "We practically worked on every building in Pittsburgh," said David Graciano, who owns half the company along with his brother Rick, both grandsons of founder Joseph.

Graciano has worked on The Pittsburgh Children's Museum, the former Three Rivers Stadium, Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh and the Western Pennsylvania Hospital in Bloomfield. "A lot of them we worked on twice."

Overall, about half the buildings Graciano Corp. restores are historic landmarks. The company, now based in O'Hara, generates about \$20 million a year in revenue and employs 350 during peak summer months and 150 during winter.

Current Pittsburgh projects include the roof of the Union Trust Building, where the company is replacing, repairing and waterproofing the Downtown building's terra cotta tile roof. Each tile has to be replaced because they're subject to freezing and thawing and can become brittle and fragmented.

The company also has completed work on the exterior and interior of Downtown's Fulton Building—it cleaned stained and damaged sections of stone, and replaced mortar and window

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—Glenn Foglio, president of Graciano Corp.

sills to restore the building to its original 1900s style.

When David Graciano first entered the family business in the late '60s, about 70 percent of business was based in Pittsburgh. But as Big Steel became little steel, that changed.

"In the 1980s, we recognized there'd be less work," he said, so the company opened offices in New York, Cleveland and Akron, Ohio.

Now, about 70 percent of its work is outside the Pittsburgh region and the out-of-town offices are starting to attract repeat business. "We go where the work is," he said.

Yet David Graciano doesn't foresee the company ever leaving its hometown. Talent and good work are the keys to success in the business, not location, he said.

Other past projects in the Graciano portfolio include state houses in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island, Manhattan's Rockefeller Center and MetLife Tower and The Almas Temple in Washington, D.C.

At the Rhode Island Capitol, the company restored cracked white Georgia marble masonry and installed fiberglass owls to crown the dome. In New York, it restored the Queensboro Bridge after 50 years of neglect, bringing back its original use as an open-air market—it was built in 1914.

Over the years, said company President Glenn Foglio, the masonry process has become more complicated, requiring more skill and planning. While personal contacts are still important, contracting has become more public and price-oriented.

The result is Graciano doesn't always earn the contracts for which it bids, forcing it to continue to expand into new markets. But that's good, Foglio said, because its history speaks for itself.

"We're an 85-year-old company, and we have a proven track record."—Antonio Gilb

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