

# The Lehigh Way

*Looking to  
the Future*

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Lehigh Summer  
Picnic and Rally

*pg. 8*



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# The Lehigh Way

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## The Lehigh Way Editor

Doug Eberhardt,  
Director of Marketing  
& Communications



We highlight our 40-year anniversary again in this issue. However, while celebrating the past, we also look forward to the future.

We had a picture-perfect day in July for our 40th anniversary picnic. The picnic was held in conjunction with our first ever Lehigh Road Rally, which is sure to become an annual event.

Thank you to all the Lehigh Family, subcontractors, partners and old friends who gathered to share lots of great memories. Please look for the photo compilation in the center section.

Five for Forty details five award winning projects dating back as far as 1994 that hold special significance at Lehigh and have made a meaningful impact on the WNY architectural landscape.

Our feature story spotlights the ongoing ownership transition underway at Lehigh as my three partners grow into their new role. Heading toward 50 years, we will continue to foster an environment of opportunity, growth and fulfillment.

Ask the Expert spotlights the transformative power of interior landscaping and plants on the office environment. We turned to pioneer Kathryn O'Donnell to answer questions about her passion. She also shares some inspirational projects and helpful resources to get your imagination going.

A colleague recently posted on LinkedIn about *The Lehigh Way* and the value of a well-crafted printed piece in today's digital world. So, my appreciation and thanks to all the loyal readers of our "old school" magazine!

Sincerely,

David E. Knauss

President



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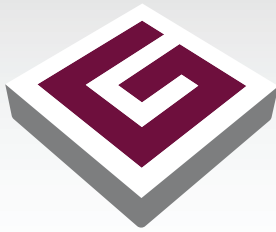
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# 5 FOR 40

by Doug Eberhardt

Lehigh has been recognized with many awards over 40 years, but there are five construction accolades that have special significance, including a national honor for excellence in construction.



*AGC NYS Build New York Award*

The Associated General Contractors of New York State (AGC NYS) is the leading voice of the state building industry, representing contractors dedicated to the ideals of skill, integrity and responsibility.

While AGC NYS focuses on construction advocacy, economic development, education, legislative affairs, regulatory affairs, safety and networking, it also recognizes the best construction projects in New York annually with the Jeffrey J. Zogg Build New York Award.

The intent of the award is not only to laud the work of the general contractors or construction managers of each winning project but also to commend the entire team, including the project owner, architects and engineers, subcontractors, suppliers, and the craftspeople who contribute to each winning project's success.

Since 1990, there have been more than 514 entries with 137 winning projects. Winners are presented with a trophy made of Lake Placid blue granite on a sleek black pedestal. Like the piece of New York granite, the award symbolizes substance, quality and dependability.

Lehigh is honored to have received four Build New York awards for the Roycroft Inn Restoration, the Asbury Church Restoration, the Frank Lloyd Wright Rowing Boathouse and the Canterbury Woods Performing Arts Center, as well as a National Award for Construction Excellence from the Associated Builders and Contractors for the Westminster Presbyterian Church Sanctuary Restoration. Here are brief overviews of each of these projects.

## **Project: Westminster Presbyterian Church Sanctuary Restoration – 1994**

The Westminster Presbyterian Church has long held a place of pride in Buffalo's rich building history. The church was originally constructed in 1854 and is well known for its stained glass by Louis Comfort Tiffany.

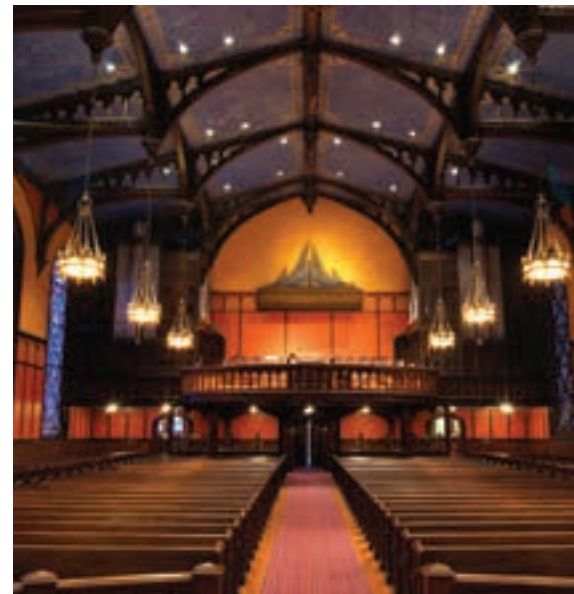
The interior restoration responded to a complex history of prior alterations and a new design that bound these elements in one place. As the project general contractor, Lehigh successfully completed the sanctuary renovation in just six months.

The work began with the demolition of a majority of the balcony, the entire chancel platform, existing floor coverings and finishes, and the protection of the existing stained-glass windows.

Lehigh was honored with a prestigious National Excellence in Construction Award for this historical restoration by the Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) for this project. ABC is the merit shop construction industry's voice with government and media.



*ABC National Award for Construction Excellence*



### Project: Roycroft Inn Restoration – 1996

Lehigh coordinated a large team of subcontractors and vendors during the course of the nine-month Roycroft Inn restoration project. Project Manager Marty Knauss remembers the project as “the first big restoration project that I undertook. It was really special because we finished it in 1995, just in time for the 100th anniversary of the Roycroft Community.” Many local subcontractors were employed on the job, in addition to substantial Lehigh labor. Marty felt that “the project was unique in that the carpentry and painting needed to be completed by multiple companies ... not just one.” Lehigh employed three painters and wallcovering companies and at least seven different millwork, window and door companies. Lehigh returned again in 2000 to complete eight additional suites in a neighboring guest house.



### Project: Restoration of The Asbury Church – 2006

This landmark project in downtown Buffalo involved the complete restoration of a historic Buffalo church into Righteous Babe Records Headquarters, “The Church” music venue & Contemporary Arts Center for local artist Ani DiFranco.

Marty Knauss was the project manager and remembers the “The Church”/Babeville project as “the longest and most comprehensive” he has worked on. Over the course of several years, Lehigh comprehensively restored and adaptively reused the entire structure and site.

The interior was completely renovated and the roof was fully torn off and reclad in slate and copper. The subbasement was lowered 4 feet, and the entire sanctuary perimeter was underpinned to create a habitable basement. Fifty percent of the south tower was torn down piece by piece to restabilize it. The north bell tower was fully restored and stabilized with structural steel, new louvres and completely repointed, including the entire spire. The parking lot contains 15 geothermal wells that are used to heat and cool the building, the first ever for a commercial building in WNY. Lehigh also constructed a fantastic modern art space and home for Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center.



### Project: The Frank Lloyd Wright Rowing Boathouse – 2008

Building a boathouse on the waterfront in Buffalo, New York, is at best a challenging task. Constructing a future landmark and masterwork — originally by Frank Lloyd Wright, perhaps America’s greatest architect — is a far greater task. The boathouse resembles a moored boat and fits right in along the Black Rock Channel near the Peace Bridge on the Niagara River.

Marty again was the project manager and recalls, “This was by far the most difficult job that I have ever undertaken. Not only were the design and details challenging, but we were dealing with working directly on the Buffalo waterfront at the end of Lake Erie. To construct the project, we needed to employ a portable cofferdam to dewater the shoreline for sitework, seawall and foundations. The site was flooded twice by two 100-year storms, and the coffer damming was destroyed and required rebuilding.”

“Additionally, we battled daily with an army of muskrats that lived along the shoreline we disturbed. They would chew through the cofferdam at the waterline, so our site continued to flood on a daily basis.” Wright originally conceived the building to be built on an inland lake or river in Wisconsin, and while the boathouse has been a tremendous addition to the WNY community and waterfront, the site and structure have faced a harsh environment since completion in 2007.

**Project: Canterbury Woods Performing Arts Center – 2023**

The Canterbury Woods Performing Arts Center and Community Theater was an important addition for enhancing the quality of life of the more than 400 senior residents, staff and the surrounding community.

The innovative elliptical design is unique in that it is constructed of 8-inch and 10-inch radiused Insulated Concrete Forms (ICF) walls and is the first building of its type in New York State.

Project Manager John Rupp praised Lehigh field employees saying that the project “highlighted Lehigh’s ability to adapt to a new structural systems on a complex project, while showcasing the self-perform abilities of our finish carpenters.”

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# Lehigh Summer Picnic and Rally

*by Doug Eberhardt*

## Summer Picnic

On a picture-perfect Saturday in July, the extended Lehigh Family and friends got together to celebrate our 40th Anniversary with a picnic in the country.

Guests enjoyed a beautiful day with great food, yard games, a skid-steer bounce house, a photo booth and the XOXO pop band.

The celebration was capped off by a fireworks show that provided a WOW factor to rival any town pyrotechnics display.

Thank you to the entire Lehigh Family for 40 years of wonderful memories.





**Lehigh Road Rally**

A group of motorcycle riders and Jeep aficionados joined together to make the first Lehigh Road Rally an instant classic.

Organized and planned by Lehigh Superintendents and their wives, a scenic route allowed riders to arrive in time for the start of the Lehigh 40th Anniversary picnic.

Participants established a unique logo and t-shirt suitable for riding and cruising, and the group made an impressive and loud entrance into the party.



*The Road Rally Crew arrived in thunderous style.*



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# Looking to the **FUTURE**

by Doug Eberhardt



Lehigh Construction Group Inc. was founded by Dave Knauss and Tom Glomb in 1984. While Tom retired in 2017, Dave is still involved in day-to-day operations more than 40 years later.

In November 2021, Dave began implementing a transition plan adding new partners to the ownership team to help ensure a smooth leadership conversion. Long-term employees Chief Financial Officer Doug Stormer; PROJECT Group Leader Marty Knauss; and Industrial Services Manager Nick Sabal all joined the ownership group at that time.

Each of the new owners brings a wealth of Lehigh knowledge and relationships with clients, subcontractors and industry partners to the ownership team, and each is eager to take on additional roles and responsibilities.

## Meet the Co-Owners

### *Doug Stormer – Chief Financial Officer*

Doug brings a diverse and strong business background to the group with more than 37 years of financial experience including 24 at Lehigh. As CFO, Doug balances an overall view of the company with keen insight into the factors that impact current performance while monitoring industry trends and looking to the future. His educational background includes a BA in Accounting and Business degree from Thiel College and he is also a Certified Public Accountant (CPA).

Doug offers his perceptive and discerning observations to the management team, project managers and PRO service managers and reviews the financial performance with team members monthly. Doug oversees accounting and HR in addition to the warehouse staff.

### *Martin Knauss – Lehigh PROJECT Group Leader*

As the leader of the Lehigh PROJECT team, Marty relies on more than 38 years in the industry, including 31 at Lehigh. Marty's team of project managers oversees the large jobs and client relationships that have made Lehigh a trusted resource for our long-term customers. Marty has personally overseen many of the signature showpiece projects that Lehigh has successfully completed throughout Buffalo and Western New York.

His architectural degree from Syracuse University allows Marty to understand and respond uniquely to client needs, and his MBA from the University at Buffalo has helped augment

and refine his business skills. Marty also holds a LEED AP Certification.

Marty fosters an atmosphere of collaboration. He is results driven and produces some of his best work to meet demanding client schedules and deadlines.

### *Nick Sabal – Industrial Services Group Leader*

Nick originally started with Lehigh in the field as a temporary employee and quickly worked his way up to leading the Lehigh PRO division. Throughout his 18 years with Lehigh, Nick has established himself as an invaluable resource to both clients and Lehigh team members at all levels of the company. His formal education is from Broome Community College, and he has project manager training credentials from the Associated General Contractors Project Manager Development Program.

Nick was instrumental in launching the Industrial Services division that reignited a focus on traditional Lehigh strengths working with concrete, masonry and steel — a team which he currently manages. Nick also drives Lehigh's commitment to safety and has extensive training, holding OSHA 30 and OSHA 510 certifications. His calm demeanor during the most difficult situations gives clients and team members unwavering confidence in Lehigh, ensuring that the job will be completed successfully.

Nick has expanded his position to be an additional resource to Lehigh superintendents and visits out-of-town jobs to provide additional support. As the youngest member of the group, Nick will ensure the continuity of Lehigh ideals for years to come.

## Q&A With New Partners

The new co-owners sat down as a group in an informal Q&A session to discuss how the ownership transition has progressed to this point, and what they see as opportunities and challenges for Lehigh in the future.

### *How has the transition gone from long-time employee to owner?*

Doug mentioned that as the company financial leader, he has always acted as a steward of the business, and not much has changed day-to-day. Marty felt that the move has been mostly

seamless as he continues to oversee his project team, but that he has moved from being more of an estimator to becoming much more involved with Lehigh people. After starting in the field, Nick brings the field perspective into the office. After stints as the Lehigh PRO Group leader and Industrial Services Group leader, his role has morphed into a problem solving and troubleshooting position interacting with the field crews and superintendents much more. Each of the three continue to perform many of their original duties but have handed off some day-to-day duties to focus on longer-term goals while giving other employees the chance to learn and grow.

#### *Do you see your role changing in the future?*

Marty said that all three of their positions continue to evolve as Dave shifts additional responsibilities to them. Marty expressed interest in taking on new business and sales relationship roles that Dave handled in the past. Nick mentioned juggling his current responsibilities but also strongly felt that “being in the moment” to assist in the field as situations arise is increasingly important. Doug noted that the current transition of Dave’s roles and responsibilities is like the process Lehigh went through when long-time office and HR Manager and Executive Assistant — and jack-of-all-trades — Josie Stockweather retired in 2022.

#### *What are Lehigh’s strongest assets?*

All three new owners agreed that Lehigh People are the most important strength of the company and the element that clients refer to most when talking about Lehigh. While they all noted the people as the most important asset, it was also cited by each as one of our largest challenges going forward. As the seasoned workforce approaches retirement age (more than 30 percent of the team has been with Lehigh for more than 20 years), recruiting new employees who buy in to the “Lehigh Way” and bring a strong work ethic is one of the most difficult issues facing the company in the future.

Another crucial asset noted was the company reputation — the good name Lehigh enjoys in the industry and in the community. Doug relayed several anecdotes of clients and people in the community who’ve mentioned what a good name Lehigh has earned over 40 years. Lehigh has always gone to great lengths to not be anyone’s “bad contractor story,” and the team works every day to maintain that invaluable reputation.

Marty and Nick also talked about the “Culture of Safety” as being one of the company’s strongest assets. Safety is ingrained in every employee from their onboarding orientation, 30-hour OSHA requirement, weekly toolbox talks, monthly safety training and an “I’ve got your back mentality.” Many employees have shared the confidence they have in having Lehigh looking out for their best interest, citing the emphasis on safety.

#### *What do you view as Lehigh’s greatest challenges in the coming years?*

Fewer young people having an interest in joining the trades was a concern voiced by Nick and Doug. All three members felt that

newer employees are less inclined to stay with a company for an extended period of time than past generations. The challenge for the company is to continue to create opportunities and career paths to keep employees engaged and fulfilled.

Another challenge will be passing along the skills and tribal Lehigh knowledge as older employees transition into retirement. After 40 years, with hundreds of years of Lehigh experience already retired and more to follow, the new leadership team will be tasked with maintaining a highly skilled and flexible workforce instilled with the Lehigh culture passed down from those who came before.

#### *What changes do you see in the construction industry and how will Lehigh adapt to them?*

The group cited 3D printing, prefabrication and AI as emerging trends in the industry.

Nick relayed a project Lehigh completed for a client, which involved the construction of a prototype plant for the eventual onsite 3D printing of the concrete foundations for windmills in wind farms. Most of the industry implementation of 3D printing to date has been in the residential sector, but the group noted that, should it become more prevalent in the industrial sector, Lehigh will be poised to get on board.

Many large project contractors are experimenting with prefabrication due to the shortage of skilled labor in the industry and continued supply chain challenges. With the exception of plant produced precast wall panels, for which Lehigh is a strong advocate, the group doubted that this would be a viable option for Lehigh as prefabrication is best suited for repetitive work — and no two Lehigh projects are ever quite the same.

AI is everywhere and is also working its way into the construction industry. Lehigh is already experimenting with some AI supported administrative and project management tools. However, the group was adamant that construction will remain a people-centric industry, especially relating to field operations.

#### *One piece of wisdom for Lehigh people?*

In closing, Marty talked about the fundamental Lehigh mantra of “Work Hard and Treat People Right” as one of the best takeaways for employees. He also felt it important that employees look out for each other. Doug agreed and talked about Lehigh People “treating people the way they’d like to be treated.” Nick shared that he likes to put people ahead of himself and encouraged others to do the same.

The new Lehigh co-owners were all very thoughtful and looked forward to living up to the standards established by Dave and Tom, and they all expressed optimism for the future and enthusiasm for taking Lehigh to the next level.



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# *Ask the Expert:* Kathryn O'Donnell

## Green Wall Maven, Botanicus Interior Landscaping

Kathryn O'Donnell, a 50-plus year pioneer in interior landscaping, shares her insights on the transformative power of plants in the workplace. With a legacy of innovation and an induction into the International Plantscape Hall of Fame in 2018, Kathryn's expertise is unparalleled. To discover the value-based concept of incorporating nature indoors, scan the barcode to gain access to her "Plant Mastery Guide" for detailed tips and inspiring project examples.



### **Q: What are some of the benefits of having living plants indoors?**

A: Some of the most common benefits include lowering employee stress, offering a natural solution for cleaning the air and boosting employee productivity and creativity.

### **Q: Are pre-planning and design of interior landscaping important?**

A: Much like the importance of pre-planning a construction project to include the utilities, materials, foundation, structure and interiors, it is equally important to plan your interior landscaping.

Working with a professional from the start will produce a beautiful and functional environment to support optimal plant growth and help avoid repetitive changes to substantially save costs. Adequate lighting requirements, plumbing and space requirements can be tailored up front to provide the best outcome for any office or space.

### **Q: Can plants help create a WOW factor in the office?**

A: Many of our clients consider their interior landscaping to be an integral extension of their overall environment. Prime examples include the Frank Lloyd Wright Darwin Martin Conservatory (pictured) and George

Eastman House, which both show the impact and value of bold projects.

### **Q: Can plants provide employees with a healthier environment?**

A: A study by Rachel Hoffman suggests that exposure to living plants for 20 minutes a day at least three times a week can improve mental wellbeing and help reduce stressors in the office.

### **Q: What are living green walls? How do they integrate into office spaces?**

A: Living green walls help play up your space with plants on your wall (scan the barcode for examples). They create and sustain a welcoming allure and healthy climate to help create a stunning first impression in your lobby or business entrance and can utilize all types of watering systems. Living walls can be recessed or surface mounted, including no-drain options.

### **Q: What are some of the best interior plants for Western New York?**

A: There are so many, but most plants that do well in areas of lower light can thrive here. Some favorites include the ficus family, which includes about 850 species of woody trees, shrubs and vines.

### **Q: What is the biggest misconception about working with a plant professional?**

A: Some prospects see us as coming in just to "water the plants." Our work begins with soil preparation, PH adjustment, correct sizing of planting containers, disease and insect resolution, healthy nutrients, and hydration, which can be a science unto itself. We come in and listen to customers before creating a plan and maintenance schedule.

### **Q: Where can readers find more information and tips with horticultural projects?**

A: The QR code below has links to some of our beautiful office portfolios and includes access to our vertical wall systems and Plant Mastery Guide. We also have a series of 2- to 3-minute Botanicus Green YouTube "prunethis" videos that teach even the newest plant novice tips to be more successful with their own plants, and of course Botanicus has experts who will be glad to review your goals to help achieve your best space.



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