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Caring for the Cathedral

Maintaining 'The People's House of Prayer' Requires High Standards, Eye for Detail

Joe Alonso is still discovering the hidden intricacies of Washington National Cathedral. He had seen the small plaster model frieze of several angel heads—a generic model to guide the stone carvers in their work. The actual frieze goes all the way around the top of the 301-foot central tower, just below the pinnacles. “When we were up on the scaffolding, we could see that every one of the 396 carved angels on the frieze has a different expression.”

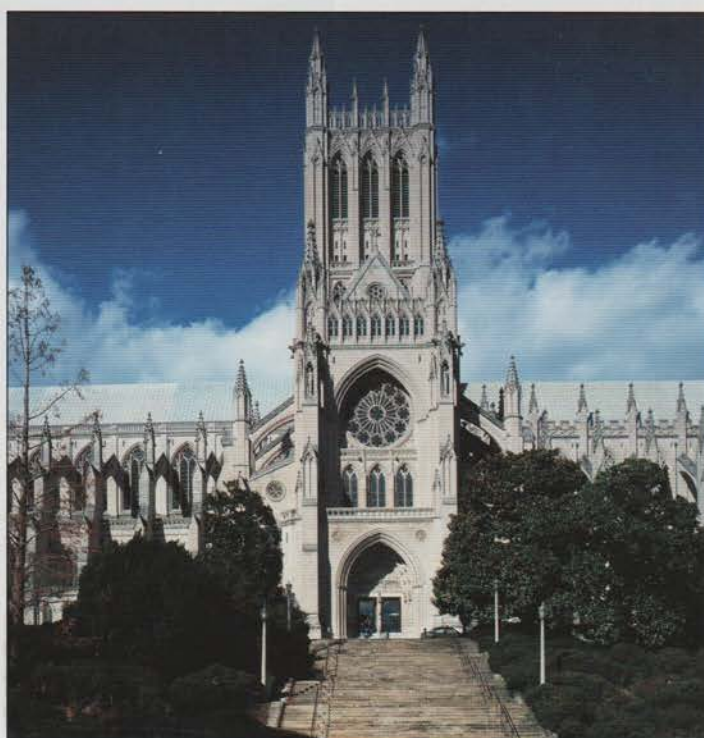
You can't see the angels from the ground, but that's irrelevant to the men who designed the cathedral and those who built the grand edifice—including Alonso, a stonemason who helped set the final stone on Sept. 29, 1990—83 years to the day after the first stone was laid. These days, as mason foreman, he oversees the stonework of the cathedral and the other institutions that make up the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation.

“You might ask, ‘Who’s

going to see the angels’ faces?’” says Alonso. “For that matter, who’s going to see this fine carving, that exquisite flower, that beautiful little finial?”

But attention to symbolism and detail is part of the Gothic architectural tradition and reflects the cathedral's status as a national house of prayer for people of all faiths. On January 6, 1893, Congress granted a charter to the foundation, allowing it to establish a cathedral and institutions of higher learning. Signed by President Benjamin Harrison, the charter was the “birth certificate” of Washington National Cathedral.

This is where important national days are celebrated and where fallen leaders are mourned. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., preached his last Sunday sermon here in 1968. Thousands gathered for President Dwight D. Eisenhower's funeral in 1969. Prayer services for soldiers killed in Vietnam and for Americans held hostage in Iran were held at the cathedral. More than 150



CAROL HIGHSMITH

Wagner has helped maintain Washington National Cathedral for more than a decade.

people are interred here, including President Woodrow Wilson.

Each year, 700,000 visitors experience the cathedral's soaring architecture and lovely stained glass windows (particularly “the jewel of the cathedral,” the west rose window). It is the sixth-largest cathedral in the world, and the second-largest in the United States (St. John's in New York City is larger).

And so when it comes to

repairs and maintenance, including roofing, “we're holding to that same standard found throughout the cathedral,” says Alonso.

On a late August afternoon, he and Chuck Wagner, president of Wagner Roofing Company, are—where else?—walking the cathedral roofs, inspecting recent repairs and discussing future projects. Alonso calls over to workers performing other maintenance high above the

Wagner Restores Carriage House's Tile Roof

When the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation wanted to renovate the circa 1920 carriage house of the old Beauvoir Estate, to house administrative offices for the National Cathedral School for Girls (NCS), Wagner Roofing was asked to restore the Spanish-style red tile roof to its original durability and beauty.

Major repairs were required to bring the building up to standards. On the roof, the felt and flashings under the terra-cotta tiles were worn out. To replace the felt, Wagner workers removed all the tiles on three roof areas; they salvaged as many tiles as possible, setting them aside for later installation.

After installing two layers of felt over the entire roof, Wagner reinstalled the original tiles along with some new tiles. "It was a challenge to match the old, weathered tiles to achieve a uniform look," notes Chuck Wagner. "We recommended installing new tiles on the north slope of the building's two-story section where we felt the difference would be least noticeable."

Wagner added snowguards to the roof and installed new copper gutters and downspouts. Lead-coated copper was used to repair and replace the rusted galvanized iron soffit under the eaves as well as parts of the cornice, including dentils (teeth-like decorative metal pieces). Finally, the entire metal soffit around the carriage house was prepared and painted.

Wagner also acted as general contractor for other



CAROL HIGHSMITH

restoration work on the carriage house, including scaffolding, carpentry, and painting of the exterior masonry walls.

"The quality of Wagner's work is excellent, and their people are knowledgeable and skilled," says Pedro Martinez, NCS's director of buildings and grounds. "The job was complicated. For example, because sections of the soffit had holes and were rusted, Wagner made a mold and duplicated the soffit. Then they made new pieces that they attached to the old, for a continuous, seamless pattern."

Martinez also appreciated the ongoing communication encouraged by Wagner: "They kept me informed about what they were doing and why ... we consulted closely throughout the project."

Wagner's Bob Wooldridge and Gabriel Romero did the tile work on the carriage house, and Randy Herald, George Stebbing and John Tielman handled the metal work. Jeff Wooldridge managed the project.

Tile: The Near-Perfect Roof

Beauty, durability and safety are an unbeatable combination in roofing material. Tile comes in a range of colors and finishes, enhancing a home's appearance and style, according to the Roof Tile Institute. Customers can choose from carefully blended hues or wood and slate textures that simulate nature. "Tile does not wear out," explains Chuck Wagner. "Only the 'underlayment' and flashings deteriorate over time, and those can be replaced." Tile roofs can last from 75 to 100 years if properly maintained. Wagner recommends annual maintenance to check for broken tiles caused by painters, gutter-cleaners and other pedestrian traffic. ("Keep the Fiddlers off the Roof," he admonishes.) Flashings should be regularly inspected for damage and repaired as necessary. Another bonus: Tile's extreme durability—a capacity to withstand fire, wind, hail, earthquakes and snow—means that manufacturers offer some of the longest warranties in the roofing industry.

ground. "What's a cathedral without a scaffold?" he laughs. "It's a work in progress. ..."

They inspect a roof area that until recently had vexed the cathedral's overseers: that is, where the "new" central tower, dedicated in 1964, meets the older north and south transepts—the arms of the cross-shaped cathedral. "On a big building like this, there was likely movement and settlement that popped the seams on the lead roof of the transepts," explains Alonso. For years, there were leaks in these corners, and water poured down into the nave and transepts below.

Several decades ago, in an attempt to stop the leaks, someone brushed glue onto the lead and slapped on EPDM, a black rubbery material. "It held for awhile, but it looked terrible and was just a Band-Aid fix," says Alonso. "Last year Chuck and I came up here to figure out what to do. Chuck is great about coming up with a game plan."

Next, Wagner Roofing's Randy Herald removed the EPDM in six areas of the roof, installed ice and water shield, then placed the new batten-seam lead roofing. Says Alonso: "He matched the original 1930s lead roof beautifully. And look at the soldering—this should last 100-plus years. Now this is the real deal, Chuck. Nice, neat work."

"There were other options for making the repairs," notes Wagner, running a hand over the new lead panels, "but we settled on what was in keeping with the standards throughout the rest of the building."

Later, inside the cathedral, Alonso points to the ceiling

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Chuck Wagner (left) and Joe Alonso on a recent roof-tour of National Cathedral.

underneath one portion of the newly repaired roof. "This is where the big gusher was. When it rained, water would run down through a column and drip into the corner of the crossing, and the custodians would bring out the trash cans to catch the water."

Wagner recently replaced the flat roof over the Rare Book Library on the southwest side of the cathedral, as well as a corresponding roof on the northwest wing, with 20-year modified bitumen and 6# lead scuppers.

Randy Herald continuously monitors the cathedral's numerous lead downspouts, which over time tend to sag, buckle

and split. When downspouts are due for replacement, he duplicates the look of the original using a more durable and stronger lead-coated copper.

For more than 10 years, Wagner Roofing has helped the foundation maintain the facilities belonging to all the institutions on the 57-acre "close," including the cathedral, St. Albans School, the National Cathedral School for Girls, Beauvoir Elementary School, the College of Preachers and Church House, the office of the bishop.

"Chuck employs great craftspeople," says Alonso, "from metalwork specialists like Randy to the workers who removed and replaced the Spanish-style tile roof on the carriage house (see sidebar). He's got the guys."

But Alonso points out that Wagner Roofing represents more than technical expertise. "Those of us who work here know that this is a special place and we have to do our best. And Wagner's people know it, too. They respect the cathedral." ●

Wagner Honored at DOJ Project

For the second time in six months, Wagner Roofing was named Contractor of the Month at the modernization project at the main U.S. Justice Department building on Pennsylvania Avenue. Gilbane Building Company honored Wagner for outstanding service during January 2004. Wagner also won the award for August 2003 for ongoing roof repairs on the four-square-block, 75-year-old structure.

In the Works

These Wagner jobs are in progress or recently completed. To discuss or visit any of our projects, call Chuck or Sheila Wagner at 301/927/9030. Unless otherwise noted, jobs are in Washington, D.C.

Durant Recreation Center (Renovations Unlimited), Alexandria, Va., membrane roof

Lincoln Summer White House (J.S. Cornell & Son), Soldiers' Home, Rock Creek Church Road, N.W., new copper and slate roofs

Sixth and I Sts. (N.W.) Synagogue, restoration of neighborhood landmark, including relaying dome's tile roof and replacing Star of David copper finial

Takoma Aquatic Center (Davis Construction), 300 Van Buren St., N.W., shingle roof

U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, Md., slate repairs on officers' quarters

Vermont Avenue Baptist Church, 1630 Vermont Avenue, N.W., new 50-year shingle and copper roofs

Renewing Garrett Park's Town Center

When an entire town is designated in the National Register of Historic Places, a great deal of care and attention goes into restoring one of the community's earliest and most historic structures.

The town is Garrett Park, Maryland, nestled between Rockville Pike and the town of Kensington. The building is its lone commercial structure, Penn Place, owned by the town. With the Post Office, a café and the "town lobby" all housed here, it's easy to see why Penn Place is the heartbeat of the little community—one of several that sprang up along the Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in the late 1800s.

And, not surprisingly for a secluded settlement of just 357 single-family homes, residents wanted a say in how to preserve their town center, bring it up to code and possibly expand its facilities.

The debate over what to do about the aging Penn Place began nearly 10 years ago, when continued maintenance problems and the need to upgrade mechanical systems and structural defects were becoming obvious. After many town meetings, various architectural and engineering studies and careful consideration of financing issues, the Town Council approved plans to create a modern building that preserves the identity of the old structure, which was completed around 1888.

Under the watchful eye of Charlie Nestor, site superintendent for Kfoury Construction Group, a renewed and vibrant Penn Place is taking shape.

The original building, whose architectural features had been obliterated over the years, is being returned to a more 19th-century appearance,

establishing the original "L" shape and adding decorative porches to the front. Plans also call for erecting a new rear wing, which will house the Post Office and town lobby.

The patterned slate roof on the old building needed immediate repair, and Nestor calls the work of Harvey Kneas and other members of the Wagner team "awesome." He adds: "They're craftsmen—a cut above the rest." Kneas's unique combination of skills—slate work, scaffold-building, carpentry—have been particularly useful. "My hat's off to Harvey!" says Nestor.

Wagner removed the old decorative slate, installed new scalloped rafters and replaced the roof. "It looks better than the original," says Nestor. According to Garrett Park Town Administrator Ted Pratt, "Wagner took particular care in removing the old slate to salvage and reuse as much as possible; they saved the town a lot of money."

Wagner also has been contracted to install fish-scale wood shingled siding on the new addition.

Wagner's extensive experience with historic buildings is helping ensure that the Penn Place restoration project runs smoothly; Nestor meets weekly with Wiedemann Architects, and Maryland Historic Trust representatives are involved in the restoration of the historic exterior.

Achieving authenticity is important to all the firms involved in the project—for example, special knives were made to manufacture wood siding and trim that duplicate the gentle groove of the original.

When the project is complete, Penn Place promises to serve the citizens of Garrett Park well into another century. ●

Letter From the Vice President

Wagner Interns Bring Spirit of Renewal

My last letter was written shortly after 9/11, and I was working in the garden and looking forward to the renewing spirit of spring. That renewing did happen in my garden and in me. We have found another way of "renewing" ourselves at Wagner Roofing. Over the past few years, we have hired a number of young interns to work in the office; they have brought a renewing spirit and fresh approach to some of our old routines.

My sister, Susan, has three incredibly bright daughters, Caroline, Meredith and Amelia, who are all in college and work with us as time permits. Caroline started with us in January 2001. A computer wizard, she helped us begin our digital photography department by setting up guidelines and installing software for storing digital images taken by the estimators. Her sisters followed in her footsteps, and each has

brought her own ideas and amazing thoroughness to the job. They helped complete the storage system of "old files," which enables us to retrieve customer information quickly when a warranty is involved.

Our daughters, Lisa and Rachel, also have worked here during school breaks. Rachel is a junior architectural student at Catholic University. She set up as-built drawings of the physical plant and began the process of identifying all of our computer network stations. Lisa is in a Ph.D. program at Stanford, studying clinical psychology. She just analyzes everything we do.

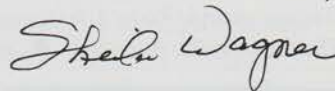
Marie Flannery, another college student and niece of one of our project managers, developed Wagner's computer "notebook," which identifies all computer hardware; she also has mastered Photoshop and keeps our digital photo files in order.

In fall 2002, Chuck got a call from a local distributor,

who said that his nephew, a senior at George Washington University, was seeking a semester of independent study and wanted to work at a roofing company. Lee Simon of Hartford, Conn., grew up in a family roofing business. When Lee arrived, Wagner was using its own custom estimating software. Lee polled the estimators, contacted multiple suppliers of estimating software, held demonstrations and ultimately, with Chuck's approval, followed through with the purchase and installation of new estimating software.

We would like to thank all of these smart young people who have passed through our office and who keep renewing our spirits.

Sincerely,



Sheila Wagner

Who We Are

Chuck Wagner, Sheila Wagner
Owners

Louis Barba
Controller

Larry Myers, Troy Sampson, Lee Simon, Jeff Wooldridge
Estimators

Royce Ball
Project Manager

Kenny Batten
Commercial Roofing Superintendent

Denise Berti
Project Manager/General Contracting

Barbara Demarest
Project Manager

Colleen Kennedy
Administrative Assistant

Sergio Luise
Project Manager/Purchasing

Rhonda Potter
Assistant Controller

Jennifer Rozier
Service Department

Dan Williams
Sheet Metal Superintendent

Adrienne Whyte
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