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Building on the American Dream





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DREAM TEAM The staff of Giambrone Companies includes (from left) Arvid Goracke, April Dolovacky-Mazer, Mike Thane, David Giambrone, Dennis Opsitnik, Patricia Giambrone and Paul Rozewski.

Building on the American Dream

Giambrone Companies' founding family believes anything is possible with hard work, determination

By Linda Bloom & Mark Watt | Photos courtesy of Giambrone Companies

When David Giambrone was 17 years old, he had left home and was working as a garbage collector in Broadview Heights. Just three years later, he had gone into business himself as a masonry contractor and built three apartments in that same Cleveland suburb – on a street where he once emptied trash cans.

“[That experience] reaffirmed for me that good, hard work can lead to success,” says David, a third generation bricklayer who has grown his evolving company for the past three decades.

These days, David runs a family of five business enterprises under the informal name of Giambrone Companies with his wife of 23

years, Patricia (Pat). This includes Giambrone Masonry, Inc., the masonry and stone installation company that David incorporated as a union contractor in 1977, and Giambrone Construction, Inc., a full service general contracting company led by Pat. Almost exclusively targeting public work, Giambrone Masonry and/or Giambrone Construction

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Photos by Ken Kryth

WINNING WORK Giambrone Companies' project portfolio includes work for top Cleveland sports facilities, such as the Bert L. & Iris Wolstein Center (left) and Progressive Field (right).

have successfully completed projects in Northeast Ohio ranging from sports facilities like Jacobs Field, Cleveland State Convocation Center (now the Wolstein Center) and Cleveland Browns Stadium, to countless public school buildings such as Shaw High School and Orrville Middle School.

Also encompassed within the Giambrone Companies umbrella are three related companies, established in 2006. Giambrone Distributors, LLC is an area distributor for green building products, such as countertops and terrazzo flooring made from recycled glass. Universal Scaffold & Equipment, Inc. provides rentals for

all types of construction equipment, from scaffolding to forklifts. Lastly, Natural Stone Products of Ohio, LLC

“While a lot of other people my age were going to school, I was making money and learning lessons about honor and respect in the real world.”

**DAVID GIAMBRONE
GIAMBRONE COMPANIES**

is a full-service fabricator of granite and marble products.

All five companies are based out of a custom-built, brick and stone facility situated just off of Route 14 in Hudson.

Although there are a total of 55,000 square feet of buildings on the property, including a four-bay mechanic garage and a multi-bay warehouse, the centerpiece is an 18,500-square-foot office building along Aurora Hudson Road where Dave and Pat work alongside six in-house employees. The first floor of the office building houses tenant offices and a fitness facility, while Giambrone Companies occupies the second floor, which includes offices, a foremen's conference room, main conference room, copy room, plan room and a full kitchen, along with three patios.

There is plenty of activity that takes place within the facility, but you

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READY FOR THE ROAD David Giambrone's motorcycling interests are reflected in a lobby space (left) at the companies' headquarters in Hudson, which includes (right) a four-bay mechanic garage, a multi-bay warehouse and an 18,500-square-foot office building.

wouldn't know it from the outside: there is no sign advertising the building as home to Giambrone Companies.

"I've never had a sign on a building," David says. "Our competitors know where we are. Clients know how to find us. I'm very low profile. That's how I am. I'm not looking for anything else but having a nice career and going home to my family."

Character building

Despite his desire to stay out of the spotlight, David is proud of where he comes from and what he has been able to

achieve in the past 33 years. "I've lived the American Dream," David says. A second generation American (his family came from Sicily), he was raised in a lower middle class household. He didn't do well in school, he says. But he did develop a strong work ethic that, when paired with a strong sense of independence, led him to pursue a career in the construction industry on his own terms.

"I hung around with some tough characters when I was younger," David says, noting that he started riding motorcycles as a teen, a hobby he continues to this day. "While a lot of other people my

age were going to school, I was making money and learning lessons about honor and respect in the real world."

David was 20 when he started Giambrone Masonry in 1977 and worked hard to grow his business, eventually bringing in his first employee to help with paperwork in 1982: his wife-to-be Pat, who met David when she leased him a car while working at an area car dealership. Pat's role expanded into a position as controller and office manager, as she became more and more involved with estimating and supervisory functions over the years.

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The late 1990s brought big changes to Northeast Ohio construction and Giambrone Masonry as well, David says, noting that the formation of the Ohio School Facilities Commission had a profound effect as millions of dollars began pouring into the construction of schools around the state.

In 1999, to take advantage of new building opportunities becoming available throughout the region, Pat started her own general contracting company: Giambrone Construction.

As a female business enterprise owner in a male-dominated industry, Pat is best described as driven, especially when it comes to her career.

"Dave said, 'Get all your certification and let's go,'" Pat says. "I was tired of working for everyone else and wanted to work for myself. We have four daughters and one son, so I needed somewhere for my daughters to go when they grow up."

David adds, "We thought it would be easier for a daughter to follow in her mother's footsteps than for a daughter to follow in her father's footsteps."

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LEARNING CURVE Giambrone Companies has completed numerous projects for the Cleveland Municipal School District, including Garfield K-8 School (right), shown under construction and as an architectural rendering.

A certified Female Business Enterprise/Disadvantaged Business whose reach extends throughout Ohio and Western Pennsylvania, Giambrone Construction continues to find success to this day with Pat managing the administration building staff and David supervising all field staff.

As for office and field personnel, Giambrone Construction is very careful in putting together individuals with a long line of construction experience behind them. The company's management team includes personnel with over 15 years of commercial construction experience. This qualified team heads up departments in administration, project management, estimating and scheduling. The onsite supervision team is a skilled and educated group with over 30 years of experience in the construction industry.

Jobsite safety is paramount at Giambrone Construction. From the beginning, the company has imple-



Images courtesy of Richard L. Bowen + Associates, Inc.

mented, maintained and enforced its corporate safety program with detailed steps for quality control of site-specific safety policies and procedures on each project. Field superintendents conduct daily job-site safety inspections, conduct

weekly safety meetings and maintain all subcontractor safety programs.

Projects, past and present

When David looks back at the companies' project portfolio over the years,

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several projects stand out as particularly noteworthy. The \$3 million East High School gym was one of those projects, as it was the 2000 collapse of this roof that led to the passage of a bond issue in 2001 to rebuild Cleveland's deteriorating schools. The "Warm, Safe and Dry" project is an ongoing, \$11 million process to repair Cleveland Municipal School District buildings with the greatest immediate need. The \$1.8 million Success Tech Academy renovation, in downtown Cleveland, included state-of-the-art computer labs, while also making provisions to continue its focus on arts education.

At the new Shaw High School in East Cleveland, Giambrone provided the shell and interior packages, for \$15.4 million; it's the company's biggest

"For me, it's never been about how many jobs we have going on at any given time. It's about the quality of the work. We are not above doing a \$1,000 project and we're not afraid to do a \$25 million job."

DAVID GIAMBRONE
GIAMBRONE COMPANIES

project to date. General trades work for Massillon Middle School in Massillon was a \$3.6 million project. A \$4 million project at Garfield Heights High School provided the community with new academic, health and physical education centers with Giambrone performing metal stud, drywall, masonry, caulking, fireproofing, acoustical ceiling and site work.

Currently, Giambrone is working on three school projects in the area – Garfield Elementary School, Wilson Elementary School and Ravenna High School – as well as two smaller masonry projects.

"For me, it's never been about how many jobs we have going on at any given time," David says. "It's about the quality of the work. We are not above doing a \$1,000 project and we're not afraid to do a \$25 million job."



PRIZED PROJECT PORTFOLIO Giambrone Companies has completed a range of Northeast Ohio projects over the past three decades, including (from top) Strongsville Fire Station, Massillon School, Shaw High School, Warner K-8, Beachwood Fire Station and Browns Stadium.

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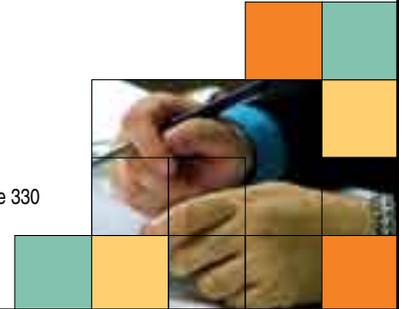
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INSIDE & OUT A \$4 million project at Garfield Heights High School provided the community with new academic, health and physical education centers with Giambrone performing metal stud, drywall, masonry, caulking, fireproofing, acoustical ceiling and site work.

When asked what makes Giambrone Companies unique, David notes that his background and upbringing give him a unique perspective on the building process; he has been a subcontractor his whole life and understands what is important to them.

“The way we treat our subcontractors really separates us from our competition, as far as I’m concerned,” he says. “We have a subcontracting mentality. I’ve been subcontracting my entire life. I know what is important to them. What is important is having work available when the contractor says it will be avail-

able. So we work real hard at making sure that when we ask someone to be on site, there is actually work for them to do and that it can be continuous, and we pay our bills quickly.”

Adding to that are lessons David learned years ago when he first made his way into business, adopting ways of living that he thinks subcontractors can respect.

“The things I learned back then, like the value of honor and the importance of sticking to your word – those things have been building blocks to my success,” he says. “I’m fair, but I’m not

giving anybody anything for free. If you earn it, you’re going to get it. I’m going to live up to my end of the deal and, for damn sure, you better live up to yours. That’s another part of my upbringing; hanging out with some tough people, you better be honorable – or else.”

Working toward the future

These days the Giambrone’s maintain normal business hours, Monday through Friday. “You’ve got to have balance,” David says. His interests include spending time with his family and playing golf. Pat concentrates on her children. They



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DIVERSIFIED GROWTH What started 31 years ago as a one-man masonry contracting business has grown under the leadership of David and Patricia Giambrone into a family of five companies. One of those companies, Giambrone Distributors, LLC, is an area distributor for green building products, with a showroom (above) located at Giambrone's Hudson headquarters.

have four daughters, ages 14, 16, 18 and 27, and a son, age 25.

As David and Pat look to the future, they are open to the idea of passing the company on to worthy successors in coming years.

"We've talked about selling the company to the employees, keeping the company name going," Pat says. "Even with the kids working here, I'm not going to just hand it off to the kids. They have to work for it."

"None of my children will automatically inherit the company, only if they're worthy," David says. "There are other people here I have worked with to get them to buy into the culture and to continue to grow and build a career for themselves. I work with them everyday in the hope that they get it. An important part of business is to *earn* a right to business, not *inherit* a right to business."

So someday, David and Pat Giambrone will pass on the reins, but for now they simply look to continue building.

"I have gotten up every morning for the purpose of putting up buildings, not for the purpose of making a lot of money, although I've done okay," David says. "That's what I will continue to do." **P**

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