



» The Mott Haven Campus will feature four schools in one central building on an 8.7-acre site in the Bronx.

DeMatteis Gets Schooled

DEMATTEIS IS BUILDING ONE OF THE LARGEST SCHOOL PROJECTS IN NEW YORK CITY. BY BROOKE INFUSINO

The scene in New York's education system is not a new one. As density increases in the state and facilities – some of which are more than 60 years old – begin to deteriorate, the public school system begins to bear the brunt. This scenario has played out time and again in areas across the United States, but what makes the situation unique is the city of New York's School Construction Authority's (SCA) solution to the aging infrastructure.

The plan? Use an integrated approach with the local communities, contractors, architects and engineers that results in the construction of new facilities to meet the needs of the student population through the 21st century.

The DeMatteis Organization understands this approach and utilizes it to its advantage. The Elmont, N.Y.-based contractor is one of the top contractors for the SCA and in the northeast and has been since its inception in 1918, Senior Vice President Scott DeMatteis says.

The DeMatteis Organization brings to the table far more skill, experience and resources than are typically associated with a general contrac-

The DeMatteis Organization

www.dematteis.org.com

- *2008 revenues: Approx. \$750 million*
- *Headquarters: Elmont, N.Y.*
- *Employees: 500*
- *Services: General contracting and construction management*

"We try to approach our work with the SCA with a team attitude, not simply as a general contractor." –Scott DeMatteis, SVP

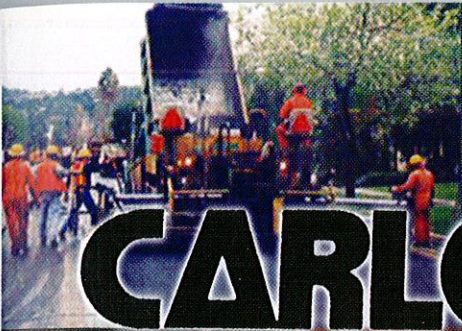
tor for building and renovation projects, the company maintains. "At the heart of its abilities lies [our] veteran staff," it says. "They provide the crucial in-house quality control and engineering skills that have allowed DeMatteis to successfully complete such varied construction projects as exhibition halls, residential high-rises, commercial, industrial, hospital, correction and parking structures."

"Right now we have been very busy in the educational sector, and for the last 10 years or so we have been the premier builder for the SCA," DeMatteis notes.

Now third-generation principals, Scott and his brother, Richard, are continuing the legacy of their father and grandfather by building schools.

Rewarding experiences with the SCA have led DeMatteis to pursue additional projects with the authority, Vice President of Construction Steve Tartaro explains. Each project put out by SCA is competitively bid and comes ready with a complete set of design documents.

"We try to approach our work with the SCA with a team attitude, not simply as a general contractor," DeMatteis notes. "We partner very well



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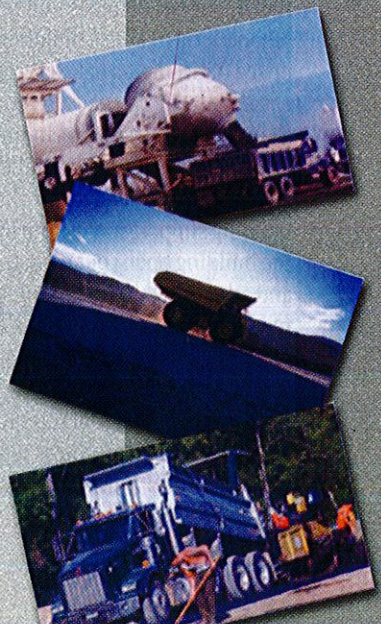
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with their project team and we try to anticipate problems before they arise. DeMatteis would rather be proactive than reactive, and that goes for everyone from the project managers to the field staff, and trickles down to all of our subcontractors.”

Campus Approach

Of the many projects DeMatteis has contracted with the SCA, the Mott Haven Campus project is the largest in the authority’s history. The design of the campus is a multi-school building, with each organization operating as a separate school. Each school shares an athletic field on an 8.3-acre site. The site was a large, underutilized city-owned parcel that had been an inactive rail yard in the Bronx, thereby providing an opportunity for redevelopment, according to SCA President Sharon Greenberger.

‘We try to approach our work with the SCA with a team attitude, not simply as a general contractor.’

The project broke ground in late 2006, and DeMatteis was in close contact with the SCA as soon as the contract was awarded. The \$160 million project includes four individual schools located atop a building podium, comprised of two floors below the sidewalk entrance level. The podium houses the spaces shared by the schools, including an auditorium, music rooms, dance studio, library, kitchens, cafeterias, gyms, locker rooms and building support spaces. The lowest floor of the building opens out on to the open yards and athletic field. The campus will house roughly 3,310 fifth- through 12th-grade students in an intermediate school, a charter school and two high schools.

The core challenge of this project was to design a building of almost 300,000 square feet for four schools with a total of 2,300 students.



» Sunset Park High School (above) in Brooklyn combines three high schools into one facility. The Frank Sinatra School of the Arts (below) in Queens, N.Y., will offer specialized programs geared toward the arts.



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The goal was also in creating the advantages of a small school setting with the amenities generally associated with large schools.

SCA collaborated with the Department of Education (DOE) and its partners on the project – the South Bronx Churches and Metro IAF. “The building was designed as a single campus building where the four school organizations each have their own dedicated exterior entrance plazas and interior instructional areas that enable them to function largely as independent schools,” Greenberger notes. “The overall size of the project offered opportunities for a wide range of specialty classrooms and for large common spaces, which will be shared between the four.”

Site Challenges

Greenberger says the most unusual aspect of this school design was imposed by the site itself. “The sidewalk level at the school entrances is effectively two stories higher than the level of the football field,” she says. “To reinforce and stabilize the retaining wall, which holds up the sidewalk, “jet grouting” at the foot of the retaining wall was called for. This construction technique, where a slurry is injected into the soil to create a column of concrete mixed with soil, enabled the construction of our new buildings within just a few feet of the retaining wall, which belongs to DOT.”

Decisions Made With Authority

With more than 1,300 public school buildings under its jurisdiction, New York’s School Construction Authority (SCA) relies on a fully integrated team to handle the complex nature of new construction and renovations.

The SCA was established by the New York State Legislature in December 1988 to build new public schools and manage the design, construction and renovation of capital projects in New York City’s more than 1,200 public school buildings, half of which were constructed prior to 1949, the authority states.

In October 2002, the Department of Education’s Capital Program was consolidated under the SCA with three main goals: to improve management of the construction process, reduce school construction costs and increase competition among contractors. *Construction Today* recently discussed the SCA’s successes and the future of school construction with President Sharon Greenberger. Below are excerpts from the interview.

Construction Today: How has enrollment impacted the school’s building program?

Sharon Greenberger: We continuously monitor changes in enrollment to determine how to allocate funding effectively. Enrollment trends are one of the critical sources we use to develop our capacity program in the capital plan.

Our capacity program is based on comprehensive annual analyses incorporating various demographic, immigration and housing factors that influence enrollment trends. The capital plan is amended annually and incorporates sustained changes in these trends. Across the city, enrollment has decreased over the past several years. Despite this general trend, certain areas are anticipated to have increased enrollment.

CT: Can you describe what the current building and renovation program looks like?

SG: In our current fiscal year 2008-09 capital plan, we are on track to commit \$5.4 billion on new, leased or charter schools. We are also investing \$6.5 billion toward renovations and enhancements for our current inventory of over 1,300 buildings.

CT: What are some of the fiscal challenges that you’ve faced building and maintaining facilities? What are some of the solutions?

SG: With over 1,300 buildings and an average age of over 60 years, the needs of our current inventory are great. However, our resources are very limited. Therefore, we need to prioritize our selection of projects and can only address the most urgent needs within our budgetary constraints.

Sites that are large enough for a school and ample outdoor recreation space are hard to come by in New York City where we compete for land with private developers. We have, in some instances, partnered with developers, incorporating schools into their projects. Alternatively we have built additions to existing buildings where the yard space is sufficient, and we also undertake adaptive reuse projects for leased space or existing buildings that we have acquired.

On renovation projects, perhaps our biggest challenge is the extraordinary level of safety and security required when working in occupied school buildings – construction activities are relegated to after-school hours and weekends, which are further compressed due to extended use of the buildings for educational and community activities. Extra care in staging, clean-up and coordination is needed when sharing a building with schoolchildren and teachers.

CT: What are some of the qualities that SCA requires of its contractors and vendors?

SG: The SCA seeks a qualified and diverse group of consultants, contractors, subcontractors and suppliers in connection with school construction projects. These firms must be capable of providing high-quality, competitively priced construction related goods and services safely and in accordance with our specifications and schedule.

CT: How has the public school system’s facilities overall been able to keep up with student enrollment and the needs of education, such as delivering curriculum using advanced technology?

SG: Keeping up with student capacity needs has demanded a flexible and creative approach to new school facilities. We have created new school space via new construction, additions to existing buildings, and through the conversion of leased buildings to school space.



As new technology is embraced by the Department of Education’s (DOE) teaching and learning community, it is included in our new schools. Wireless Internet access has been in our schools for more than a decade; most recently SmartBoards have been included in standard classroom designs for new schools.

CT: How are public K-12 educational facilities changing in their design and purpose within New York?

SG: To support the DOE’s Small Schools Initiative, new school buildings are designed to accommodate one or more small school organizations. New schools on large sites can house multiple organizations, each with their own instructional zone, but sharing the gyms and auditoriums, which are sized for the whole building.

As has always been the tradition in NYC, school buildings serve much more than a seven-hour school day, Monday through Friday. Our school buildings can readily serve the greater community after school hours and on weekends by designing for easy access to the large common spaces. A good number of our school projects have included not-for-profit partners who have dedicated space in our projects.

'For the last 10 years or so, we've been the premier builder for the SCA.'

For DeMatteis, sequencing was key in maintaining schedule and quality. "We use a proactive strategy and conduct weekly meetings where everyone is made fully aware of every issue that may arise, and the process by which to deal with each of the issues," DeMatteis says.

"We are really roll-up-the-sleeves kind of guys," he adds. "We are seasoned veterans and we know exactly what we are doing and that is what we bring to the table."

Working with up to 60 subcontractors at the project's peak, DeMatteis is aiming to get the building enclosed by the end of the year. At the time of publication, all of the structural steel had been placed and the concrete decks were poured, followed by closing the decks with masonry work.

Windows are being installed and the mechanical trades are progressing with their installations. "There is a completion date and we do everything within our power to complete the project on time," DeMatteis notes. "The kids have to be in school by a certain date."

Mott Haven is the perfect example of a campus that reflects the design trends popular in today's new school construction, according to Tartaro. New York City-based Perkins Eastman designed Mott Haven in association with Alexander Gorlin Architects.

"Schools today are designed to fit the property which they rest on," he says. "They are harmonious with the surrounding neighborhoods and they are trying to stimulate the students' senses. Architects are coming up with specific designs or color schemes or interior finishes to create a better learning environment. It's really quite different from the schools of years ago."

Greenberger agrees, adding that environmental sustainability is an element that the authority is making a priority.

"With our new Green Schools Guide and Rating System, the SCA is complying with New York City's Green Building Law and constructing schools that use much less energy, conserve water and provide superior indoor air quality," she says.

"The buildings themselves provide a learning opportunity for students and the community, and demonstrate our commitment to sustainable design."

Complying With Regulations

Because the Mott Haven campus is being built on a site that was used as a former rail yard, laundry facility and manufactured gas plant, environmental remediation was conducted, and plans are in place for the long-term monitoring of the site. Greenberger says the authority complied with all regulatory requirements during the remediation.

During construction of the new school, the SCA implemented a Community Air Monitoring Plan (CAMP) for all soil disturbance activities. Periodic visual inspections are being conducted by an environmental consultant to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.

"Safeguards are being implemented at the site during construction to ensure that the remedy remains effective for the life of the future school and that the students are protected," Greenberger says. Those measures include:

- Installation of a vapor barrier and an active

sub-slab depressurizations system to mitigate the migration of any potential volatile organic vapors into the school building;

- Construction and maintenance of a cover system consisting of concrete foundation, asphalt pavement, concrete sidewalks, artificial turf on athletic fields, or two feet of clean fill on all exposed ground surfaces including landscaped areas to prevent human exposure to underlying soils;
- Construction and maintenance of a concrete cover on all exposed ground surfaces beneath PS 156 and IS 151 to prevent human exposure to underlying soils; and
- Periodic inspections to confirm the integrity of the protective measures noted above.

Spreading its Expertise

DeMatteis's school construction expertise is also being put to use on two other new build projects for the SCA. One of the most architect-

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turally renowned projects is the \$97 million Frank Sinatra School of the Arts in Queens, N.Y.

If the name alone doesn't spark some interest, then the school's features will. The 182,842-square-foot, five-story high school will provide a unique learning environment for 998 students in the ninth through 12th grades, with particular emphasis on specialized programs in the arts.

The school's program consists of a rigorous academic curriculum and pre-conservatory studio education in one of the following: instrumental music, vocal music, fine arts, drama and dance. Students are able to accomplish academic coursework and the intensive study of an art form in three or four years through an extended-day format.

"This was essentially a school built around a theater," Tartaro explains. The state-of-the-art center features an 800-seat concert-grade auditorium, a gymnasium, two dance studios, two recording studios/performance studios, two science labs, music and art rooms and a medical suite. An equally unique feature of the building is the rooftop terrace, which will be used for performances.

In February, construction crews were finish-

'We are really roll-up-the-sleeves kind of guys. We are seasoned veterans and we know exactly what we are doing and we bring that to the table.'

ing the carpentry and millwork and installing ceiling tiles on the project. Tartaro is expecting to turn the building over in late spring.

Three In One

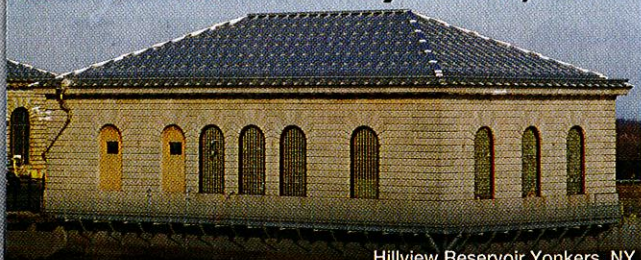
DeMatteis is using a similar campus-style construction approach to build Sunset Park High School in Brooklyn. The school combines three high schools into one main facility, and follows the city-wide trend of replacing larger schools with smaller ones.

The 197,600-square-foot, five-story building will include separate administrative spaces, standard classrooms, specialty rooms such as science lab/demo rooms, technology/distance learning rooms and a performing arts rooms. Common facilities for the three high schools include a kitchen complex/dinning area, multi purpose auxiliary rooms, 550-seat auditorium, full competition gymnasium and a 4,000-square-foot wireless technology library. Projected enrollment is around 1,500 students.

According to Project Manager Ben Menna, construction has been a very fluid process. "Things have gone pretty smooth," he says. "The neighbors have been very cooperative and we hold weekly meetings with the agency and subcontractors."

The project, which broke ground in July 2006 is on track to be completed this September, according to Menna. ♦

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