

City Living

Developer makes Manhattan's Upper East Side family friendly

Family owned for more than 90 years, The DeMatteis Organizations is a group of companies that began in 1918 in Brooklyn, New York.

Now in its third generation, the company's long history includes once being the largest builder of public schools on Long Island. The flagship company within The DeMatteis Organizations is the Leon D. DeMatteis Construction Corporation (LDDCC), one of the region's largest and oldest family-owned construction and real estate companies. Its capabilities include general contracting, construction management, design/build projects, and interior construction and renovation.

"Our company takes tremendous pride in the work it does and we have great relationships with the subcontractor community. We are very conscious of quality control and we always deliver a quality product," says John Caiazzo, Vice President, Real Estate Development for The DeMatteis Organizations. "And today we continue to build schools as well as projects for our own portfolio."

The hallmark of a DeMatteis project is that the long-term employees of the company take an ownership mentality. With strong communication and a hands-on approach DeMatteis ensures quality and integrity from start to finish. "The company's philosophy is that the principals are directly involved in every project," says Caiazzo. "Our project managers are in the office on a daily basis and in constant contact with the principals to make sure all aspects of each project is proceeding as planned."

Caiazzo feels this approach is different from competitors he has observed. "In my experience with other companies, a major decision would move slowly up the corporate ladder and it would take weeks, if not months to resolve, but at DeMatteis we can discuss potential problems with our company's principals on a daily basis. We are a close-knit organization."

Communication evolves from a comfort level that comes from familiarity. Familiarity is achieved over time and DeMatteis is the kind of organization that places a value on training and long-term employment. "Many of our field people—the superintendents—have been with the company 10 to 15 years," explains Caiazzo. "We assign every project to one of our veteran superintendents and we train young superintendents



The DeMatteis Organizations

John Caiazzo | Vice President, Real Estate Development

Location: Elmont, New York

by first making them field clerks then assistant superintendents. They work their way up the ranks.”

An all-hands-in attitude keeps the organizational communication flowing as well. DeMatteis is not the type of organization that has disparate departments that never speak. “We all know what’s going on in each project so there is cohesiveness in the way we operate,” says Caiazzo. “It’s a philosophy the principals have that has been working well since the company’s inception.”

DeMatteis’ goal is to try to maintain its base of operations while acquiring new clients and new projects through the competitive bidding process. “Because of the economic slowdown the challenge is to be successful in bidding because there are contractors bidding against us that normally wouldn’t be doing so,” says Caiazzo. “Where we would have had three or four competitive bids against us there are now 15 so we have to be more innovative in our estimating to be competitive with other companies.”

While the economic slowdown is affecting almost everyone in the construction industry, there are unexpected benefits. “Prior to the slowdown, the biggest challenge we had was the ability to have the proper personnel on hand to man the projects,” says Caiazzo. Today, there are enough qualified people to stay on top of the current project roster.

The biggest ongoing challenge—one that never changes—is the challenge present in building in Manhattan. “There is a logistical know-how you have to have here,” says Caiazzo. “Because most of our personnel have been working for us for years and are very familiar with the regulatory requirements, it makes the challenges of an intricate project much easier to combat. There are many regulatory agencies involved, especially when you build multiple schools as our company does. We meet the challenge by cataloging major requirements and making sure it’s all on our checklist when we start a project in order to avoid delays.”

Despite the slowing market, DeMatteis is still pursuing development opportunities.

THE AZURE

Currently under construction, The Azure is a combined occupancy project on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Located at 333 East 91st Street on the corner of First Avenue, Azure offers luxury family-sized homes at great values. It will be a co-op with condominium-type bylaws.

The unusual project was developed as a public-private partnership with the New York City Education Construction Fund. In exchange for building a new school at the base of the tower—at no cost to the Education Construction Fund—DeMatteis received bonus air rights allowing for a taller building.

“There was an old, abandoned school on site and the RFP required that the developer clear the existing site and construct a combined occupancy structure that included a 530-seat new middle school and a 126-unit residential tower,” says Caiazzo.

The savings were attractive to both the Education Construction Fund and the developer—and the savings will be passed on to residents as the luxury high-rise will be offered at a price point approximately 20 percent lower than is usually available in the Upper East Side.

The base of the building will provide a new home for M.S. 114, one of the highest-rated middle schools in the city. It will be a fully operational public school with a beautiful new library and windows running across the façade as well as a cafeteria, a gymnasium and a small outdoor recreation area.

“It’s a complicated project because the statute requires the buildings to have some overlap to achieve the air rights,” says Caiazzo. The foundation is the common element—and the buildings overlap on the second and third floors but the mechanical systems for the residential tower are totally separate from the school.”

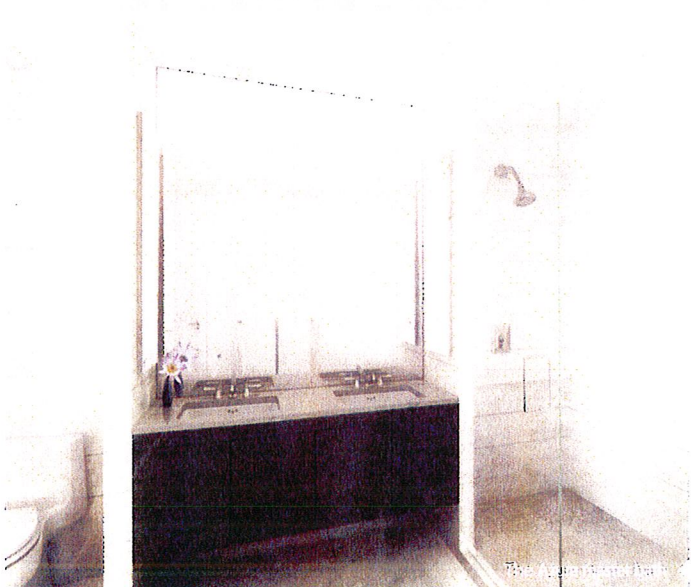
The Azure offers 34 floors of studio, one-, two-, three- and four-



The Azure kitchen



The Azure living room



The Azure bathroom

bedroom homes as well as two penthouse suites. Combination homes allow families to fully customize their living space. Some customization already underway includes reconfiguring a large walk-in closet to become a home office and converting a bedroom to a library. "There's a lot of flexibility in the building," says Caiazzo.

There are just four homes per floor above the 7th floor so each unit can enjoy a prime corner location. Spacious layouts feature eat-in kitchens and plenty of closet space.

The Azure is chock-full of amenities including a children's playroom, a teen lounge, a residents' lounge, a fitness center, concierge services, and a private dining area with an adjoining catering kitchen. Optional storage units are available for purchase.

A landscaped roof terrace towers over the city, providing unobstructed views of the Manhattan skyline and the East River.

The building itself features floor to ceiling glass window wall construction. "The views are magnificent," says Caiazzo. Exceptional finishes will be utilized throughout the project. Marble and wood paneling will grace the lobby as well as a commissioned glass art wall and a 16-foot long fireplace. In the units, Viking appliances and Bosch dishwashers will be supplied to homeowners. Bathrooms will feature imported marble and ceramic tile.

Neighboring amenities include the Museum Mile, the 92nd Street Y, Carl Schurz Park, Asphalt Green and the Waterfront Esplanade.

Despite the market slowdown, DeMatteis is filling a much-needed niche in the Upper East Side market. The company is continuing to pursue unusual projects that fill the needs of the community by practicing due diligence and careful market analysis. **DDC**

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