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Homeward bound

DeMatteis hits the century mark and eyes return to LI projects

By DAVID WINZELBERG

In the midst of its 100th year in business, one of Long Island's most prolific development firms is seeking to get back to building on its home turf.

Over the past two decades, Elmont-based DeMatteis Organization has been busy constructing high-rise residential towers, schools and public works facilities throughout the five boroughs of New York City.

Now headed by its third and fourth generations, the family-owned company that developed and built dozens of Long Island schools, hospitals, libraries and its most iconic office complex – now known as RXR Plaza in Uniondale – is once again looking for new projects throughout Nassau and Suffolk counties.

“We have not been on Long Island for quite some time,” says company principal Scott DeMatteis. “But our focus is starting to turn 180 degrees to work on Long Island again.”

Founded in 1918 by Leon DeMatteis, a mason and bricklayer who emigrated here from Italy, the company has evolved from a small Brooklyn contractor to a multifaceted development conglomerate employing about 100 people. Today, the DeMatteis Organization is comprised of Leon D. DeMatteis Construction Corporation and R/Y Management, encompassing development, construction and property management services. Another subsidiary, DM Airports Ltd., owns and operates Morristown Airport in New Jersey.

After Leon DeMatteis' son Fred returned from serving in the U.S. Air Corps in the 1940s, the business moved from Brooklyn to Elmont and became a key player in the post-war building boom here, as Long Island's population soared. Beginning in 1949, the company built dozens of schools throughout the Island's fast-growing communities. From there the firm expanded its scope, venturing into residential development through the 1960s, constructing some of the Mitchell-Lama affordable housing complexes in the Bronx and Manhattan.

In 1969, DeMatteis began work on the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Uniondale, which opened in Feb. 1972. During the 1970s, the company developed several Manhattan apartment buildings, including the Ruppert, Yorkville and Knickerbocker Towers on the site of the old Knickerbocker Brewery on Third Avenue.

Later that decade, DeMatteis went global, constructing a \$200 million, 13-building complex for the Saudi Arabian National Guard. Not long after that project was completed, Alfonso DeMatteis, Fred's brother, went on to form his own international develop-



Photo courtesy of DeMatteis Organization

FAMILY AFFAIR: Michael, Scott, Richard and Alex DeMatteis represent the third and fourth generations of the 100-year-old development company.

ment firm.

Back home, the company's signature complex, the 1.1 million-square-foot EAB Plaza, opened in 1983. DeMatteis was also part owner of the property before it was sold to Manhattan developer Joseph Moinian a few years later.

Headquartered in two unassuming brick buildings totaling about 30,000 square feet on Elmton Road, the DeMatteis Organization owns and manages a portfolio of more than 10,000 apartments throughout New York City. Over the last 30 years, the company has built some of the city's most recognizable multifamily buildings, including the 42-story Savoy luxury condominiums on East 61st Street; the 32-story Carnegie Hill Tower on East 94th Street; Museum Tower, a 54-story residential complex constructed over the Museum of Modern Art on West 53rd Street; the iconic 52-story residential high-rise at 100 United Nations Plaza; the 34-story Chelsea Tower on West 26th Street, and the Azure, a 34-story luxury high-rise on the Upper East Side that opened in 2010.

In the last several years, DeMatteis has concentrated on building, renovating and expanding many schools for the New York City School Construction Authority. The company recently completed the net-zero-energy P.S. 62S in Staten Island. In the same borough, DeMatteis is currently building the \$220 million, 325,000-square-foot South Beach Psychiatric Center for the New York State Dormitory Authority and the state Office of Mental Health. The complex, slated for completion next year, is one of eight New York City projects DeMatteis is currently working on.

Now joined by the family's fourth generation, Richard DeMatteis' son



Photo by Judy Walker

RXR PLAZA: DeMatteis developed the 1.1 million-square-foot office complex that opened in 1983.

Alex and Scott DeMatteis' son Michael, the company continues to further its legacy. Alex and Michael DeMatteis learned the business from the ground up, working on construction sites when they were on summer breaks from high school. Both graduated from the construction management program at New York University and have become an integral part of all of the firm's projects.

“We all hit the ground running. You have to understand what the process is,” company principal Richard DeMatteis said in describing the family's roll-up-your-sleeves mentality. “The thing we're most proud of is that our sons have treated this as a responsibility as opposed to a privilege.”

Scott DeMatteis added that there's no substitute for getting your hands

dirty, while learning the business.

“Before you tell someone what to do, you have to know how to do it,” he said.

And while the company has found plenty of development opportunities in the city, its principals feel that the environment for building on Long Island has turned a corner.

“Long Island towns and villages each have their own agendas,” Scott DeMatteis said. “But we're not afraid to deal with different municipalities and make a project work.”

Toward that end, the company that helped build Long Island would welcome joint ventures with other developers.

“We'd like to get back to our roots,” Richard DeMatteis said. “We're open to all sorts of ideas.”

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