



Chuck Werner, Foreman for DeBrino Caulking Associates, Inc., and a union bricklayer, caulks the head joint of the curtain walls on a special swing scaffold set up for work at the new Vassar Brothers Medical Center in Poughkeepsie, NY.

In 2002, DeBrino Caulking Associates, Inc. won an award from the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers for its restoration work on the New York State Education Department Building in Albany.

# MORE THAN ITS NAME

Versatility and solid reputation define  
*DeBrino Caulking Associates, Inc.*

by Jacquelyn Gutc

A

fter 43 years as President and Owner of *DeBrino Caulking Associates, Inc.* (DeBrino Caulking), Lewis P. Houghtaling III still looks forward to going to work.

"I think you have to like what you do. It makes it so you want to come to work every day," he says. "I like to see the fruits of our labor."

A specialty contractor, the Castelton, New York-based company does more than its name suggests—although Houghtaling notes that caulking itself is more specialized than people think. What started as caulking and waterproofing expanded to concrete repair work, shotcrete, firestopping, air vapor barriers, urethane and epoxy injection, grouting, and stone and masonry restoration over the last four decades.

The restoration work is some of what Houghtaling finds to be the most exciting and rewarding.

"If you're working on restoring a building to bring it back to life, it's something of an accomplishment you're proud of," he says. "When you restore something, you're always doing something different too; it's not the same thing day in and day out. It's pretty interesting."

## RENEWING HISTORICAL BUILDINGS

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Lewis P. Houghtaling III has owned DeBrino Caulking Associates, Inc. since 1977.

for its restoration work on the New York State Education Department Building in Albany.

At 140 feet by 590 feet, the block-long historic building was completed in 1912 and designed by renowned architect Henry Hornbostel. It has 36 hollow, fluted pillars that are each 90 feet long and made of Vermont marble. The row of columns runs the length of the building and is one of the longest in the world. According to the state, its education building was the first major building in the U.S. to be built specifically as a headquarters for education administration.

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As DeBrino Caulking Associates, Inc. has grown, its services have expanded. A significant portion of the business is masonry work such as brick, concrete and stone repair. Foreman and union bricklayer Brian Dingman works on the Firemen's Association of the State of New York's Firemen's Home in Hudson, NY.

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Houghtaling says the \$2.5 million restoration project involved cleaning the entire building, repointing and replacing marble and re-bronzing the window frames. He flew to Biloxi, Mississippi, to accept the union's award for Best Restoration/Rehabilitation/Maintenance Project of the Year, beating out other projects across the United States and Canada for the honor.

Many of the company's largest jobs are state or federal government contracts, divided equally between restoration work and new construction.

At \$7 million, one construction project that spanned 2003 to 2004 required a connection to the past and DeBrino Caulking's restoration expertise. The project involved two additions to the New York State Court of Appeals building as well as a parking garage. DeBrino Caulking was awarded the concrete masonry contract, Houghtaling says. The company built the entire parking garage—which included over 5,000 pieces of precast concrete—and the exterior cement block walls of the additions as well as the floors. It also fully grouted the CMU backup walls. Workers also installed more than 5,000 pieces of marble on the building facade, he says.

"The marble had to come through the vein where the marble from the original building did. So we had to go to the Vermont quarry to get the marble with that right vein."

### **'IT'S ALL RELATED'**

The list of services DeBrino Caulking offers for commercial and industrial customers is vast, but Houghtaling says it's all a natural fit.

"It's all maintenance and repair or keeping water out of a building," he says. "That's how we ended up getting into everything we do—it's all related."

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The company's services include: masonry work, such as brick, concrete and stone repair—parking garages and dams are common projects—waterproofing, soil stabilization, under-slab gas and wall air vapor barriers, polyurethane concrete grouting, shotcrete, interior and exterior caulking, traffic deck coatings, interior and exterior expansion joints, and firestopping.

Along with a catalog of products and services that's greatly expanded since its early days, the company has grown overall as well.

"We only did about \$98,000 of business the first year I started out, then we doubled the next year and doubled again the year after that," Houghtaling says, adding that in 2019, revenue was \$18 million.

It's a major accomplishment that Houghtaling credits to hard work, standout customer service, a great staff and never cutting corners. "That's one thing I won't do," he says. He's also done everything his employees do. The unexpected way Houghtaling got started in business helped him become that kind of leader.

## LEARNING ON THE FLY

In July 1970, he went to work for Raymond DeBrino at DeBrino Caulking Inc. DeBrino had built a name for himself in the caulking industry since founding his company in 1945, Houghtaling says. When DeBrino died suddenly in 1977, Houghtaling bought the business assets. Although the business was no longer in the DeBrino family, there was a simple rationale for settling on the DeBrino Caulking Associates name.



Union bricklayer Dennis Sisson works on the Alfred E. Smith State Office Building in Albany, NY. DeBrino Caulking Associates, Inc. patched stone, did stone Dutchmen repairs, as well as caulking and corrective work on thru-wall flashing on the building.

"We wanted to keep the DeBrino name," Houghtaling says. "It was well-known. And we figured we worked for him and we were his associates, so that's where the name came from."

From there, Houghtaling learned the business on the fly.

"I had been a field worker and foreman at the time that I took over. I had to pick up the business and learn everything pretty quick," he remembers.

"We started off slow. DeBrino was almost out of business at the time, but the name was well-known—he was probably the biggest caulking contractor around. I didn't take a

paycheck for eight or nine months. I think I started off with five or six grand and credit cards; everything was COD because you can't get credit with vendors when you're just starting out. My wife was out cleaning hotel rooms to put food on the table, but it worked out."

The business continued to grow over the decades. About 60% of DeBrino Caulking's work is in upstate New York, but the company takes on projects throughout New England and New Jersey, too. Houghtaling says they often work in Massachusetts and have a small office and warehouse in Webster.

The company's involvement in professional and community



Union bricklayers Walter Doty and Arthur Reed, with DeBrino Caulking Associates, Inc., cut out and recaulked all windows and control joints, reglazed windows and cleaned and sealed the Ten Eyke State Office Building in Albany, NY.

organizations is wide-ranging, too. Its memberships include the International Concrete Repair Institute; Eastern Contractors Association; Air Barrier Association of America; Northeastern Subcontractors Association; and the Sealant, Waterproofing and Restoration Institute. It also supports several fire companies and recreational sports leagues through donations, and Houghtaling sits on the board of trustees for multiple organizations, including the Irish American Heritage Museum in Albany, the Eastern Contractors Association's Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Local No. 2 Joint Benefit Fund and the Upstate Masonry Institute.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Houghtaling says business is likely at its peak right now, but due to competition and slowdowns from the COVID-19 pandemic, volume might drop for the year.

And as with the rest of the construction industry, it's getting harder for him to find skilled workers. He says he's always recruiting, but it's difficult to attract people to the

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industry and replace those who retire. On top of that, new employees need to be trained on the job.

DeBrino is completely union, and Houghtaling says the union trains workers through a masonry apprenticeship program, but his employees need more specific know-how that they get on the job in areas like caulking, waterproofing and other specialty work. Once they have that training and expertise, they tend to stay with the company, though.

"A lot of people have been here 30 to 40 years," he says. "Most people stay with me quite a while. If you have the work, they'll stay." He says the company typically has 90 to 120 employees and about half specialize in a particular skill, such as masonry or caulking, and half can do it all.

Although his managers now handle the day-to-day for the most part, Houghtaling believes his leadership style plays a major role in the longevity of his business and employees' careers with him.

"With me growing up through the field, they haven't done anything I haven't done, and I'm not going to ask anyone to do something I haven't done, so I relate to the men in the field," he says. "I try to treat everyone fair." 🐾

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