

# SKY'S THE LIMIT

## **BlueSkies Construction & Design LLC takes building to greater heights**

by Brittany Kuhn

Gabriel Varga was born in Costa Rica as a fifth-generation engineer. His Spanish ancestors immigrated to the country in the 1600s, and his great-grandfather was a survey engineer who mapped the border between Costa Rica and Panama.

His wife, Ira de Rijke, grew up in West Africa. Her father was an agricultural engineer whose job took her to various countries throughout her childhood, including Costa Rica and the United States. She's

proud to have been born in the Netherlands, home of the world's largest man-made island, a nod to her engineering roots.

The two met in Costa Rica and quickly discovered that they had mutual interests: a deep global perspective, innovation in their blood and environmentalism in their hearts.

Together they created *BlueSkies Construction & Design LLC* (Blue Skies), a contracting firm in Rhode

Island and Massachusetts that specializes in modern, green-friendly designs and construction.

"BlueSkies represents a clean environment," Gabriel says. "But it also symbolizes that we don't see any limitations to what we can design and create, where we can go or what we can do."

Their mantra, "The sky's the limit," represents the diversity of projects that BlueSkies fearlessly tackles.



BlueSkies Construction & Design LLC  
initiates a roof demo project in order to add  
second floor to the existing structure.



Using recycled materials whenever possible, the company prides itself on its ability to handle virtually any design or construction project—including pre-construction services, retail renovations, commercial buildings, education and medical facilities, homes and more.

"We've always been big thinkers," Ira says. "We've never been intimidated or shied away from big challenges. I think that's a huge factor to our success."

## A DREAM TO GO GREEN

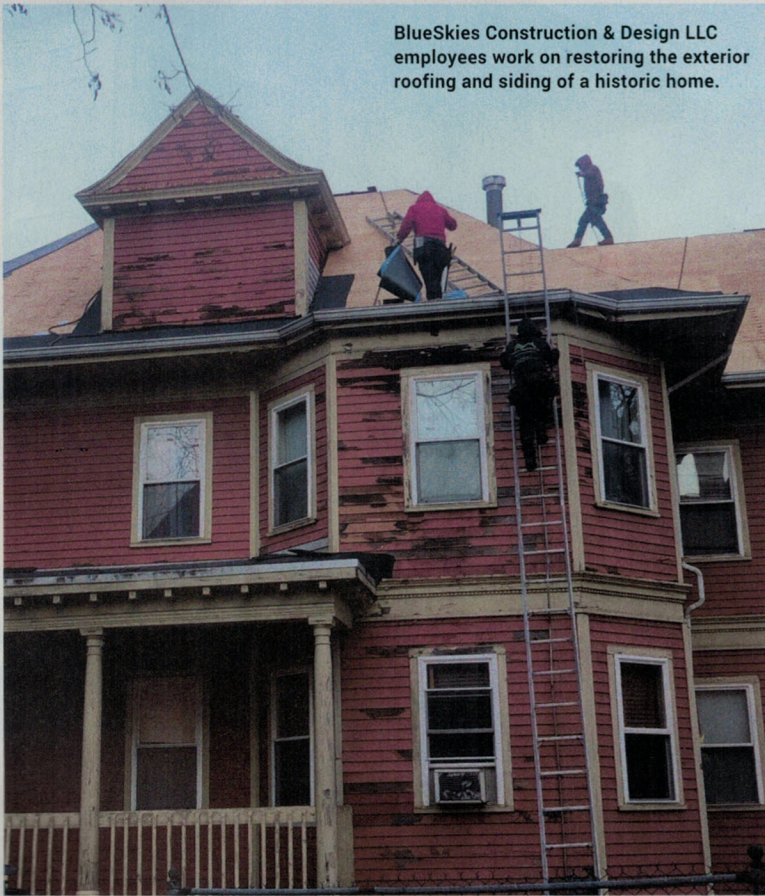
Owning a company like BlueSkies was always a dream of Gabriel's.



Gabriel Varga, CEO and Co-Owner of BlueSkies Construction & Design LLC.

Before he met Ira, he earned a civil engineering degree from the University of Rhode Island in 2002 and founded G3 Construction, LLC with the goal of designing green homes using environmentally friendly materials.





BlueSkies Construction & Design LLC employees work on restoring the exterior roofing and siding of a historic home.

and Ira by his side, Gabriel was ready to take another shot at making his green company a reality.

## SUSTAINABLE VISION

In 2013, Gabriel and Ira moved to Rhode Island and formed BlueSkies with the founding principle that no project or challenge was too big to take on.

“What we’re doing now is what I always wanted to do,” Gabriel says. “We’re growing, and I have high expectations to continue that growth. Every year has been a better year.”

They attribute the company’s success to their team of forward-thinking engineers, designers and project managers who have an eye for aesthetics and a passion for innovation.

“Engineering means to create ways to make things happen,” Gabriel says. “If an issue arises, we innovate a way around it. That creativity, and the creation of ways to make things happen, is what makes us different.”

Together, the team has tackled projects such as The Town Dock, a waterfront office building for a squid and octopus exporter in Narragansett, Rhode Island. BlueSkies oversaw the renovation of the 4,000-square-foot space, giving it new life by adding a second floor, a unique blend of New England and Scandinavian-style design and large windows.

BlueSkies also took on new challenges overseeing projects as an Owner’s Project Manager, partnering with some of the leading construction and real estate management

G3 Construction (meaning “green growth general contractor”) was the second environmentally friendly company in New England and the first of its kind in Rhode Island. At that time, however, the market simply wasn’t ready for his vision.

“Green construction was so new that people didn’t even know what I was talking about,” Gabriel laughs. “I was doing a lot of restoration projects, but I wasn’t reaching the target I wanted.”

When the U.S. economy took a downturn in 2008, Gabriel’s dream was put on hold. He took a corporate role at the largest supermarket chain in New England, and it was there that he realized the power of possibility.

“My learning experience was unreal,” he says. “I discovered it was never a matter of, ‘It cannot be done.’ If you want to build a ladder to the moon, you can do it—you just have to figure out how.”

Gabriel’s career eventually led him back to Costa Rica where the construction industry was booming, and he oversaw commercial projects such as Starbucks, McDonald’s, Popeyes, and multimillion-dollar residential builds.

That’s when he crossed paths with Ira, who worked in real estate and also had dreams of building.

With years of experience under his belt, a renewed sense of purpose





The BlueSkies Construction & Design LLC team at a midsummer employee appreciation event.

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Gabriel Varga, Co-Owner,  
BlueSkies Construction & Design LLC

companies in the world, starting with the renovation of a school in Seekonk, Massachusetts, and a range of other large projects.

The company even built a traffic circle for the city of Central Falls, Rhode Island.

“I’m so impressed by the diversity of our projects,” Ira says. “We’ve done historical, commercial office buildings from the ground up and major renovations.”

## GREATER HEIGHTS

While BlueSkies continues to seek greater heights, it’s bringing others along with them.

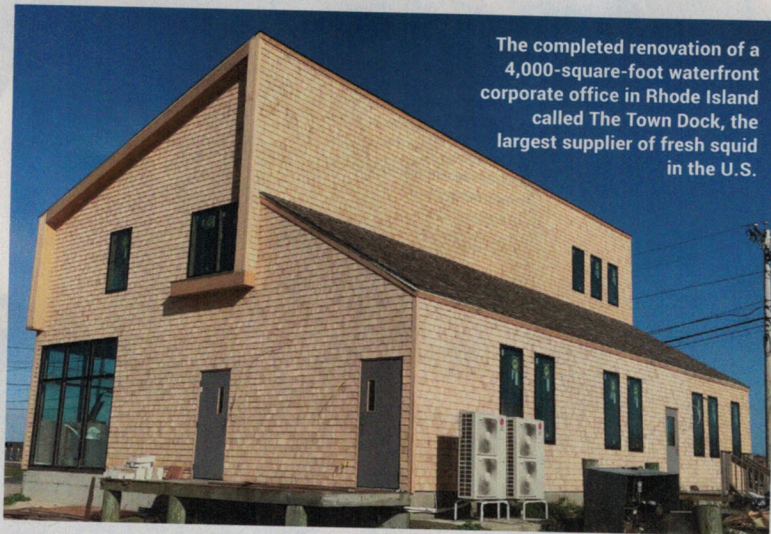
As owners of a Minority and Disadvantaged Business Enterprise in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, Gabriel and Ira try to help out other minority-run and disadvantaged businesses every chance they get.

“I’m an engineer who’s been in construction for 25 years, but when people hear my accent, they sometimes assume I’m a laborer with limited capacity or that we don’t have the qualifications to do the work we’re doing,” he says. “In many cases, we have to prove people wrong.”

Knowing full well the challenges that minority businesses face, Gabriel and Ira try to incorporate those businesses into BlueSkies’ proposals. They’ve hired and partnered with many of them, even helping them get opportunities to work on federal or state-run projects.

“Often, what these companies do in the field is very good, but their paperwork needs improvement,” he says. “We





The completed renovation of a 4,000-square-foot waterfront corporate office in Rhode Island called The Town Dock, the largest supplier of fresh squid in the U.S.

help them achieve what they need to get the next level.”

Someone who’s benefited from this partnership is Moises Chevalier, Owner of Chevalier Electric LLC.

“We pride ourselves on the quality of our work, but the paperwork can be challenging,” Moises says. “They’ve helped us a lot, walking us through the process and making sure we’ve got it all done right. It’s really a pleasure to work with them.”

Gabriel says that standout people like Moises, and the reliable team of subcontractors they’ve built over the years, are what make the company great.

“Each person that works with us is an essential part of the company,” he says. “We seek out people who have pride and a love for what they do. That way, everybody is pulling together in the same upward direction at the same time.”

## STRONG ROOTS

Six years have now passed since BlueSkies was created, which is

the same year and even month that Gabriel and Ira’s son Isaac was born.

With a shared spirit of ingenuity and purposeful environmentalism, the two are proud to admit they already see signs of an engineer’s curiosity in him, too.

“The way he thinks and acts, it’s been so clear to us—he creates things in his mind and is a problem-solver,” Ira says.

It’s a nod to strong family roots and the generations of engineers that

came before them, as well as a reminder that their efforts will matter to the next generation to come.

With that in mind, Gabriel keeps a steadfast focus on the possibilities ahead.

“My wife and I are from different parts of the world, so we were raised with different concepts of construction and have a deep conscience about the environment,” he says. “We’re just trying to add our small grain in the sand of the big industry of this country.”

Then, he pauses for a moment.

“Who knows what we’ll be capable of next?” he says with conviction in his voice.

After all, the sky’s the limit. ☁

*Brittany Kuhn is a journalist and award-winning communications professional specializing in topics ranging from aerospace to innovative technologies.*



BlueSkies Construction & Design LLC prides itself on its ability to handle virtually any design or construction project, including high-end interior home kitchen renovations such as this one.