

Newton, MA

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## ELEVATED EXCELLENCE

### Veteran-owned elevator company rises to the top

 Vicki Speed

When he was 10 years old, Dan Wrenn visited the Port of Boston, a seaport in the Boston Harbor, with his father. Young Dan didn't much care about the ships, the containers or bustling activity of the harbor. Instead, he was fascinated watching his father install a new elevator in one of the massive ship-to-shore gantry cranes. In that instant, he knew he'd found his calling, and set a course to learn all he could about this challenging and dangerous profession.

Today, Dan is the President and co-owner of Eagle Elevator, one of the area's largest independent elevator service companies with offices in Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and Maine. Dan, his growing family of elevator constructors and his talented crew have become an integral part of projects that range from university building upgrades to the installation of new offshore wind turbine elevators to,



Eagle Elevator's Walt Farren, lead elevator mechanic, installs the elevator systems for the Block Island Wind Farm, the first commercial offshore wind farm in the U.S.



Walt Farren (right) and his assistant Justin Cohenno.

of course, the catalyst for Dan's chosen profession—crane elevators.

## Up and Down Solutions

Dan learned all he could about elevators through his teenage years, including taking classes and apprenticing. At the age of 18, he joined the military and spent the next five years as an aircraft mechanic in the Air Force. With his tour of duty complete, he went through the National Elevator Industry Educational Program (NEIEP), joined the International Union Elevator Constructors with his dad, and went to work as an elevator constructor. His brother, Paul, followed a similar path. He finished high school while playing hockey, then joined the union and went through the NEIEP.

At the age of 35, with 10 years of experience under his belt, Dan and his brother Paul decided to start their own elevator company and their father, Dan, followed soon after.

They put a list together of 50 clients that might need their services and began a slow and steady rise as one of the top independent elevator installation and repair companies.

## Slow and Steady Rise

Eagle Elevator's first job was for a Boston-based owner of a five-story building with overhead elevator tracks that needed to be updated. The Wrenns also developed strong relationships with elevator manufacturers.

Dan recalls, "Business development took some time because none of us had experience with the commerce side our operation. But, we are really good elevator people."

The company's reputation grew—one project, one elevator repair and replacement at a time. Early on, Dan, his brother and father made a rule that no one gets paid unless there is \$10,000 in the bank and all the bills are paid. Within that first year, they turned the corner when they were hired to modernize multiple elevator systems in several buildings at Harvard University.

By the second year, the company had amassed enough of a backlog in the Boston area that they were able to hire administrative staff and a few elevator mechanics. Over the years, the team has also acquired a few smaller companies, expanding its reach from Greater Boston to western Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut and, more recently, New York and Maine.

Eagle Elevator currently employs 75 people, of which 55 are elevator constructors. And, they've completed some of the area's most challenging and interesting jobs including the installation of the Block Island Wind Farm elevators.

The Block Island Wind Farm is the first commercial offshore wind farm in the U.S. That job required Eagle Elevator crews to install the elevator systems within 8-foot round tubes, in three separate towers mounted on top of each other, all while on the Atlantic Ocean, 3.8 miles from Block Island, R.I. Other interesting projects include the repair of the Con Edison power plant in New York City, the modernization of the United States Military Academy (West Point) elevator systems in multiple buildings and the modernization of the Massachusetts State Police Crime Laboratory's four elevators.

When asked what distinguishes Eagle Elevator from other elevator companies, Dan quickly points to customer response time. He explains, "The difference is our attention to every customer's needs. Every night in any city, an elevator breaks. That's just the nature of the mechanical system. Too often in this business, it's only the big developer or real-estate owner with 100 buildings who gets personal, responsive service, leaving the small or mid-sized owners to wait. That's where we focus our attention. Our job is to make sure that they know they are a priority. We jump when they call, 24/7."

“

**Every night in any city, an elevator breaks. Our job is to make sure that they [the owners] know they are a priority. We jump when they call, 24/7.”**

— Dan Wrenn, Owner, Eagle Elevator

## Understanding Priorities

Eagle Elevator is still, and probably always will be, a family-owned and operated company if the current trends are an indicator. Dan is still President and Paul is the company's Service Manager. Dan and Paul's other brother, Joe, also an elevator constructor, joined the company about 10 years ago. While Dad Wrenn retired a few years ago, his grandsons are looking to fill his spot. Dan's two sons are elevator constructors and members of the local union as is one of Paul's sons. Paul's other son is in college, but works part time for the company.

Union membership is particularly important to Dan for a number of reasons, though most important is the continuing education. He explains, "Equipment is always changing as are OSHA requirements. This is a dangerous job and our guys need to be certified on every piece of equipment. Elevator constructors work in confined areas with equipment that can move at 1,200 feet per minute, and in some cases 1,700 feet per minute, with live electricity running through at any given time. It's our job to make sure someone's grandmother can get in or out of her home safely—and it's the safest mode of transportation in the country."

According to the Elevator Escalator Safety Foundation, elevators (estimated 700,000 elevators) safely move more people than any other form of transportation per trip taken (over 325 million daily elevator riders).

In summary, Dan says, "Elevator construction is a fantastic job. You never stop learning, it's surprisingly challenging, always dangerous, it pays well and there's great satisfaction. I tell my guys, 'Our job is to make sure people can get up and down in the buildings where they work, live and play as safely as possible.' It's a big responsibility, but we're up to it!"

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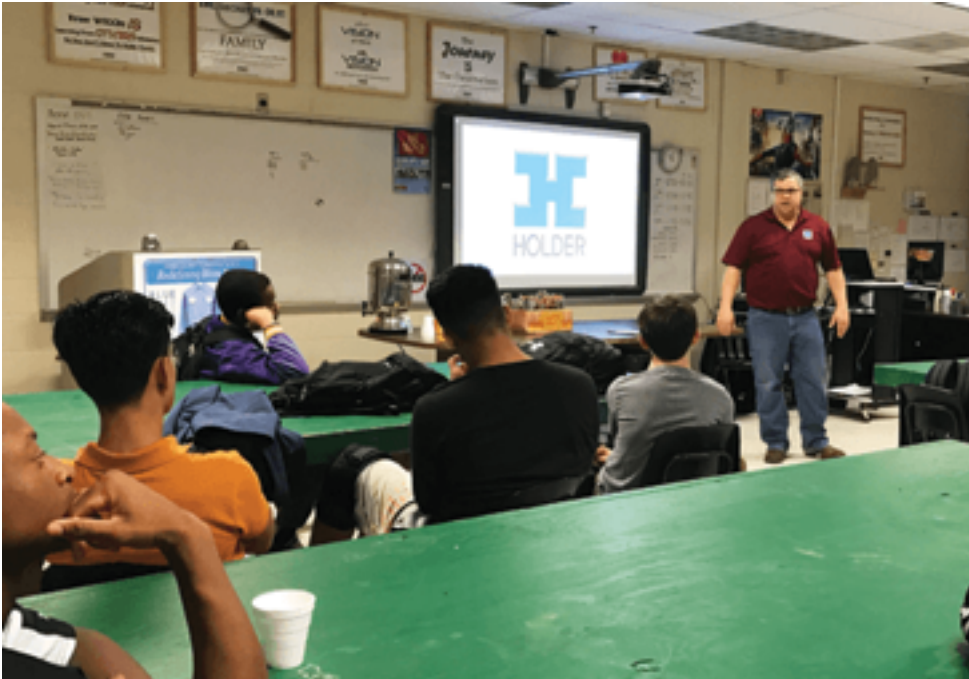
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### **VICKI SPEED**

Vicki Speed is a freelance writer with a background in engineering and a love for building and construction. She especially likes writing Who's Who articles because of the publication's focus on the fascinating leaders, innovators and visionaries behind the scenes.

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