

# Builder/Architect

**AJS Masonry**  
A Family Affair

**The Loewen  
Window Center of  
Upstate New York**  
Blending Beauty and  
Strength for Premium  
Windows and Doors

**The VMJR  
Companies**

Restoring History in  
the Capital Region



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JULY/AUGUST 2007

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## ON THE COVER

The VMJR Companies: The cover photo shows the fully restored bridge against the soon-to-be restored east side of RPI's West Hall.



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This issue's builder, The VMJR Companies, is not just a builder; they are a large firm that caters to a mix of heavy industrial, commercial, adaptive reuse, renovation and historic restoration. As you read their story you'll see that historic restoration is one of the most important lines of work they do because of its impact on the community. Victor Macri, President and CEO, says, "You have to be passionate in your pursuit." He feels it is very important to not only preserve and restore, but to do it the right way. It's this kind of integrity and passion that drive all facets of The VMJR Companies.



AJS Masonry, in Clifton Park, and The Loewen Window Center of Upstate New York, in Schuylerville, are our two local feature stories in this issue.

I first met Andrew Sciocchetti, owner of AJS Masonry, almost a year ago and was struck by his energy and enthusiasm. I was also struck after meeting with him on a few different occasions by how sincere and genuine he is. He takes pride in all his work and even though the company has grown in size, he still takes part in every project. Andy learned the trade from his father. Masonry is his life and he loves what he is doing.

The Loewen Window Center of Upstate New York is now open for business. I was first sold on the high-quality, green Loewen products when I met with Denny Giantomasi. Then I entered the new showroom and it confirmed everything I had been told, as well as show how beautiful the product is. It's wonderful that builders, architects and homeowners can now touch the product, hands on right here in the Capital Region.

Our feature on exterior detailing discusses garage doors, siding, roofing, as well as stone and landscaping. We have another Capital Region business in this national story. John DeLisle of Grasshopper Gardens discusses what homeowners want in their yards.

Another follow-up on the renovation of the 206-year-old home on the Hudson River, known as "The River," shows us masonry work, fireplaces and roofing on the home. Look for another short progress story in our next issue.

Exciting news! We will have a special issue late this summer that will feature the 2007 Capital Region Builders' Association Parade of Homes. This year's parade will be held September 8, 9, 15, 16, 22 and 23 from noon to 5 p.m.

2007 Parade of Homes Participants include:

- Adirondack Development Group
- Amedore Homes Inc.
- Drew Cathell Custom Homes
- Charlew
- Manchester Associates
- Robert Marini Builders, Inc.
- Pigliavento Builders
- Rosewood Home Builders
- Stonegate Signature Homes
- The Michaels Group
- Roarke Custom Builders

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Yours truly,

Vanessa A. Bell  
Publisher

# Builder/Architect

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# The VMJR Companies

## Restoring History in the Capital Region

By Lynn Martin

Restored brick facade of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's West Hall.



PHOTO BY MARK SAMU

If adversity introduces a man to himself, then Victor Macri, Jr. knows himself pretty well. Macri, President and CEO of The VMJR Companies, LLC (VMJR), has built over time what some might view as an empire in the construction industry, despite the odds.

Macri began his career in a testing lab, but a meteoric rise through project engineering, project management and a role as assistant to the president ultimately led to a multimillion-dollar enterprise encompassing four businesses, with Macri at the helm. These four businesses are Sweet Constructors, Adirondack Construction, Thatcher Brook Millwork and Doors, and The VMJR Properties.

VMJR, located in Glens Falls, NY, caters to a market mix of heavy industrial, heavy commercial, adaptive reuse, renovation and historic restoration. The variety of projects are supported by Sweet Constructors (formerly Sweet Associates, Inc.), primarily a heavy commercial and heavy industrial business; and Adirondack Construction. Adirondack is a 60-year-old company with a focus on adaptive reuse. Involved in institutional construction, it's frequently employed in commercial reconstruction and renovation. The wide-ranging enterprise of VMJR offers everything from construction management at risk, general construction and program management, to design/build capability.

Engaged in so many facets of construction is clearly beneficial to VMJR clientele. In construction management and in historic restoration, VMJR's emphasis is on representing owners' interests with a trained eye on budgets and schedules. They also guarantee the cost of construction and ensure the highest quality outcomes. The Design/Build Team unites the concepts of owners and architects



The slate work, completed in phase two, and masonry reconstruction, completed in phase one, are all new and historically correct, including the rebuilt chimneys.

to ensure that shared knowledge and resources are optimally utilized and delivered. In addition, the ability to begin construction while design is ongoing can save precious time and limited funds. Attention to fixed costs and specifications characterize the relationship performed by VMJR when procured as a general contractor. Finally, VMJR has the in-house wherewithal to assist those clients who lack oversight staff. VMJR will facilitate site selection, program identification, facilities management, architectural and contracting services, and myriad other planning and construction requirements, central and peripheral to the process.

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION: A FOCAL POINT FOR SWEET CONSTRUCTORS

Preserving history is important as it contributes to the fabric of a community. Because relatively few buildings with historical significance exist in our young nation — many were destroyed in the “urban renewal” process when it was often less costly to remove than to repair or restore — it is essential to preserve the ones we have. Proper historic preservation is an utmost concern for VMJR. “Proper restoration is what matters and you have to be passionate in that pursuit,” says Macri.

“It is one thing to preserve history and another to restore. We repair to *preserve* or we work to *restore*. We not only properly repair or restore, but we also have the ability to perform the most difficult tasks with our own forces. What distinguishes us from others in the field is our team’s ability to react quickly to the many adversities we encounter. We work closely with both the architect to suggest the best solution, and the structural engineer to approve the task. Whether it’s stone, brick masonry, woodwork, structural wood, concrete or steel, we

have the field expertise to remedy issues that arise to preserve the structure *and* maintain historical accuracy.”

Cost is another factor that The VMJR judiciously monitors. “Preservation and maintenance is a costly proposition and if you don’t properly clean, repoint, repair or recondition your building material, you will have adverse effects. We work to find solutions and fix design problems; however, oftentimes we are engaged in a process of restoring things that were done improperly. Using the wrong cement or mortar mix, for example, can adversely affect the structure. The wrong brick used in a repair can also cause long-term issues. If something takes 50 years to fail, then a subsequent repair should also last 50 years. Improper restoration may last only one or two years.”

## AWARD-WINNING CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

Sweet Associates, Inc., the company where it all began for Macri, was founded in 1951 by Ansell E. Sweet. What started as a construction company morphed into a comprehensive construction organization, reflecting the increasingly complex environment in which we live. Macri, armed with an AAS degree in civil technology from Hudson Valley Community College in Troy, NY, joined the firm in 1974 after managing the aforementioned testing lab. His demonstrated business acumen landed him a project engineering role at Sweet Associates, Inc., headquartered in Schenectady, NY, with satellite offices in Spartanburg, SC, and Burlington, VT.

Designated the third largest construction management firm in the United States in 1979, Sweet Associates, Inc., a prolific business, garnered numerous industry awards over the years: the American Concrete Institute’s Annual Award for the Schenectady County

### Detail of the restored north dormer roofs





PHOTOS COURTESY OF VMJR

**Northeast large bracket, which displays the bracket and restored masonry prior to painting.**

Public Library (1970); the American Concrete Institute Award of Merit for the Robert Cronin High Rise (1978); and the Concrete Industry Board 1998 Roger E. Corbetta Award of Merit for the Pine Hill Waste Water Treatment Facility upgrade. Furthermore, the Amsterdam Public Safety Building was pictured on the cover of an industry publication, the *Architectural Record*, in 1976. Sweet Associates, Inc. was also rewarded for its stellar masonry work on the Albany International Airport project with the 1998 Mark of Excellence Award, via the Capital District Masonry Institute. Work completed on the University at Albany Science and Technology Library garnered two awards: the Annual Award For Outstanding Project, Eastern New York Chapter of the American Concrete Institute (1999); and the Best of 2000 Award of Merit: Institutional Project, given by *New York Construction* magazine.

### **TROUBLE AHEAD**

Despite the many accolades, both companies experienced fits and starts with ownership turnover. Principals of Sweet Associates, Inc. purchased Adirondack Construction in 1981, an informal entity prior to WWII, but incorporated in 1947 and owned by founder Sam Jacobs. In 1981, Macri's work with Sweet Associates, Inc. was mainly in the Glens Falls area and entailed larger projects, but he was convinced this new acquisition would serve a unique market

in the Glens Falls region. Adirondack would indeed become more lucrative, and within three years the bottom line increased from a quarter million to between \$4 and \$5 million in annual business. Projects were small and local, and included millwright rigging and dam resurfacing. Adirondack was still a separate entity until 1989 when it was rolled into the same group with Sweet Associates, Inc., which was consolidated and subsequently purchased by a development company in 1985. Unfortunately, during the concluding years of the 1980s, principals of that development company passed away. There were other problems, as well. Financial woes, legal battles and environmental concerns all took their toll on the companies. Both companies were on the verge of bankruptcy, culminating in a public auction in 1991, with the national media in attendance. Macri formed The VMJR Companies and surfaced as the highest bidder.

The public auction was just the beginning of an uphill battle for Macri as he attempted to right the course of both organizations. Many projects were in disorder, redundancies abounded; however, the businesses served different markets, making the thought of a merger challenging at best. Ultimately, Macri and his management team joined but didn't merge the two companies and they were able to reduce overhead by nearly 60%.

All companies are at full tilt today.

Employing 35 full-time staff annually, the numbers can swell to nearly 400 seasonally to adjust for the increased work demand. It is this cadre of dedicated and, in many cases, long-term employees, who are credited by Macri with VMJR's success. Staff has been employed, on average, at least 10 years; many for 20 years or more, and some family members have been hired, giving the entity an impressive three-generation roster. "Our organization includes a fantastic administrative and accounting staff that keeps everything moving. We have a project management team that works cohesively to assist each other as needed. Our yard operation staff work with both the project management and field staff to ensure the jobs have what they need when they need it."

**Restored cornice small brackets**



**VMJR PROJECTS**

Notable projects of Sweet Constructors include: general contractors for the Albany International Airport's new passenger terminal and the University at Albany's new science and technology library. Other ventures consist of hospitals, a nursing home and multiple waste treatment facilities. Adirondack built the Empire State College Center for Educational Technology and Distance Learning in Saratoga, three Starbucks, the Hilton Hotel in Colonie and the U.S. Post Office in Halfmoon, to name a few.



**Left: South and west facades before restoration work began**

**Below: South and west facades after restoration**



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VMJR



Sidewalk work at the Conservatory, downtown Troy



Further sidewalk progress. These sidewalks all have underground vaults so the subframing was all replaced and then waterproofed. Radiant heating was also installed to maintain the walk in snow and ice conditions.

### BUILDING COMPANIES AND STRUCTURES

Seemingly comfortable, whether building companies or structures, Macri attributes continued success to a hardworking, cohesive team that is fostered to lead, a corporate philosophy focused on competence, integrity, reliability and quality. His positive attitude toward adversity is a tremendous attribute and no doubt learned from mentor Ansell Sweet, who once told Macri, “Never panic — regardless of the business climate.” The organizations’ collective conscience thinks *beyond today*, and is yet another reason why VMJR stays ahead of the

competition. “Our industry is very cyclical and you need to have diverse abilities. We have, over the years, proven that with the proper management team and good employees, we can outperform anyone. There is not a project that intimidates us.”

*For more information on The VMJR Companies, please visit [www.VMJRCompanies.com](http://www.VMJRCompanies.com) or call (518) 792-1128. ■*

**The Conservatory in downtown Troy is being restored and converted into apartments and retail space.**

