

# COMMERCIAL Builder/Architect

Special Feature



## Valenti Builders, Inc.

Focusing on Value, Innovation and Trust

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By Rosetta Gervasi

When Joseph E. Valenti, Jr., was growing up on Chicago's north-west side, a highlight of the week was accompanying his father, Joseph Valenti, Sr., to the company's construction sites to check what was being done on jobs in progress. "My father built for many religious institutions — churches and schools," says Valenti, Jr. "I clearly remember

visiting these projects with him as a youngster and recall how proud he was of St. John Brebeuf, which he said was the first round church in Chicago."

Today, Valenti Builders is an award-winning, full-service general contracting and construction management firm on the verge of celebrating its 70th anniversary. Yet, in many ways, not that much has changed; children are still invited to visit the sites of active construction jobs to observe the progress being made. For instance, students from the Sacred Heart Schools in Chicago were given the opportunity to tour the construction site near the end of the project, watch the work being done and help place the last piece of steel (which they had been allowed to autograph) on the building. "Letting students get involved helps satisfy their curiosity and helps them feel they are part of the pro-

### ON THE COVER

Left to right: Joseph (Joe) E. Valenti, Jr., Chairman; Jim Valenti, President; and Robert E. Weber, Chief Operating Officer, pose for *Commercial Builder/Architect* magazine in the Madonna Della Strada Chapel at Loyola University in Chicago, IL. In July 2007, the renovation of the Madonna Della Strada Chapel will be completed.

St. John Brebeuf, Niles, IL



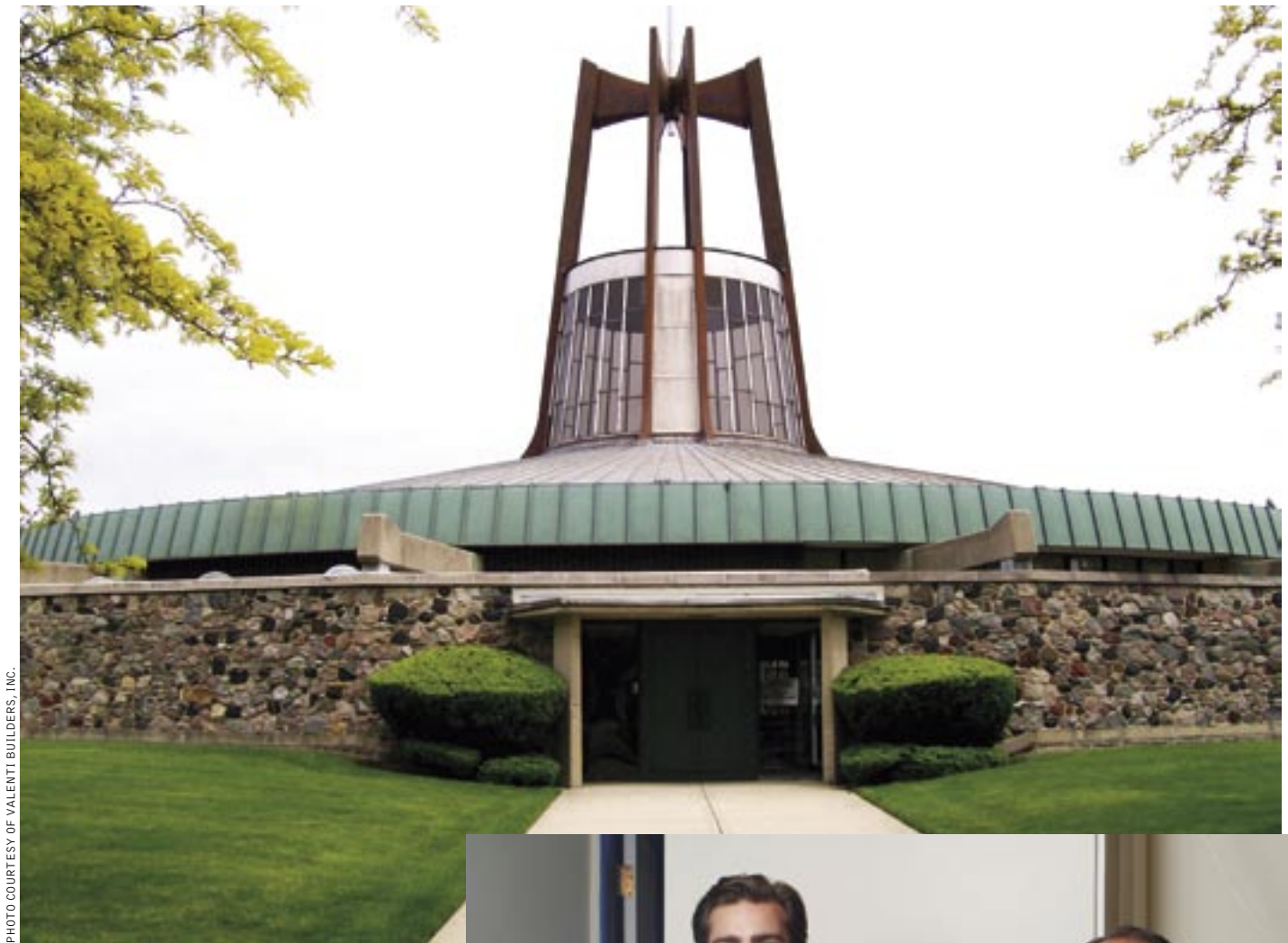


PHOTO COURTESY OF VALENTI BUILDERS, INC.

### St. John Brebeuf, Niles, IL

cess,” explains, Bob Weber, Chief Operating Officer for Valenti, adding that the company also sponsors lunches, where students can learn about the construction business.

Sister Susan Maxwell, of the order of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Director of the Sacred Heart Schools in Chicago, appreciates the company’s conscientiousness and commitment. “Our Project Manager Marty Patterson was great to work with,” she says. “We were especially pleased with how he always made himself available to us, how careful he was in his follow through and how effective he was working with both the architect and with us.”



PHOTO BY BOB MEAD, PHOTO PROS, INC.

**Left to right: Dave Galusha, Project Superintendent; Dan Valenti, Project Manager; Marty Patterson, Project Manager; and Joseph E. Valenti, Jr., Chairman, proudly stand in the Madonna Della Strada Chapel.**

### FOSTERING PRIDE IN A JOB WELL DONE

This kind of admiration from a Valenti customer for the work the company’s employees do is common. That tradition of fostering pride in a job well done in a new generation has not changed since the elder Valenti founded the firm in 1938. Valenti, Sr., whose parents emigrated from Italy in the early 1900s, started with the purchase of one residential lot on Roscoe Street. After building a house on the property, he sold it for a bit over \$7,000, realizing a profit of \$270 on the transaction.

From that modest beginning, Valenti, Sr., who passed away recently, and whose widow still lives in the house where they raised their children, saw his business expand rapidly.

In the decades that followed, Valenti added to its portfolio with major projects for the *Chicago Tribune*, Loyola Academy, the Archdiocese of Chicago, Uptown Federal Bank, Lane Industries, Brunswick, General Cinema and many others. Award-winning residential developments constructed by Valenti in Northbrook and Lincolnshire are still considered

a quality paradigm in the housing industry.

When the company outgrew its two previous headquarters in Chicago and Niles as its business continued to expand with the explosive growth of the office market, a move was made to the current Northfield headquarters, where all of its office and warehouse facilities are located.

Today, Valenti, which has built more than 1 million square feet of interior space, provides services that range from initial planning through final punch list.

Although Valenti has completed a diverse and impressive portfolio of residential and commercial projects throughout the company's 70-year history, religious construction has remained an important construction category for the company. "Building facilities for religious institutions is different," explains Valenti, Jr. "Simply stated, there is sense of working on sacred ground. We like to understand the history of the institution and the circumstances underlying the construction or renovation project."

That sensitivity to the unique traditions behind religious structures is recognized and appreciated by Valenti customers. The Reverend Thomas A. Baima, STD, Vice President and Provost of the University of Saint Mary of the Lake, Mundelein Seminary, points to an illustrative example: "Valenti Builders handled the first major construction to take place on our campus since 1930. It was a large and complex project, and in addition to creating an outcome with which we were extremely pleased, the company took extra pains to respect the reflective atmosphere of the surroundings."



**Above:** The newly constructed marble floor at the Madonna Della Strada Chapel offers six distinct types of Italian marble.

**Left:** Seen here at the Madonna Della Strada Chapel, (left to right) Dan Valenti, Project Manager; Jim Valenti, President; and Joseph E. Valenti, Jr., Chairman, represent the third and second generations (respectively) of Valenti Builders.



Father Baima explains that the property is a pilgrimage site and often attracts visitors from other parts of the country. "After the foundation phase of the project, when construction is typically the messiest, a visitor who came to campus for prayer and meditation and happened to have been involved extensively

## The Projects

Valenti Builders has a wide range of experience and expertise in commercial, industrial, recreational, retail and tenant-improvement construction:

Recent notable projects:

- **Madonna Della Strada Chapel Renovation** — Designed in the Art Deco style, Madonna Strada Chapel opened its doors to the Loyola University Chicago community in 1939. It is the university's main chapel. The architect for the Madonna Della Strada Chapel Renovation is Marvin Herman & Associates, Inc.
- **St. Joseph School** — Located in Wilmette, the church started in 1843 as a log cabin chapel. In 1998, the accompanying school was completely renovated and updated to serve children in preschool through eighth grade. The school population has already reached 300 students and continues to grow. A convent was also reopened in 1997 to house the Sisters of Christian Charity.
- **Loyola Academy** — A Jesuit college preparatory school that was established in 1909. The northeast portion of the Glenview Campus consists of ponds, wetlands, prairies and other natural areas.
- **University of Saint Mary of the Lake, Mundelein Seminary** — The University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein Seminary, is a major seminary and school of theology for the Archdiocese of Chicago. It was founded as a university in 1844.
- **Academy of the Sacred Heart for Girls and Hardy Preparatory for Boys** — Founded in 1876, Sacred Heart Schools are among the city's oldest. A Chicago landmark on Lake Michigan, the schools' campus occupies a city block and includes five buildings, chief among them is the main academic building constructed in 1929; the Campbell Gymnasium, completed in 1965; and the new Academic wing, completed in 2004.
- **St. James Lutheran School** — The first church building was constructed on a cabbage field at Fremont and Dickens in 1870. The Great Chicago Fire in October of 1871 narrowly missed both the school and new church building, and many members of the congregation and of First Saint Paul (which was destroyed) took refuge in the church's buildings. Several capital improvement programs took place over the intervening years, with the most recent effort resulting in a significant addition to the school building in 2003.
- **First United Methodist Church** — The oldest church in Chicago, it was organized in 1831 and is located in the heart of the Loop. Valenti built a 6,000-square-foot interior build-out for the Silk-Road Theatre Project, including new MEP systems, stage, sound and lighting system.
- **The Frances Xavier Warde School at Old Saint Patrick's Parish** — Valenti built the school for the Archdiocese of Chicago.



PHOTO BY BOB MEAD, PHOTO PROS, INC.

**An intricate chapel window at the Madonna Della Strada Chapel. A new lighting system was constructed to enhance artwork and the architectural integrity of the Madonna Della Strada Chapel.**

with construction projects, stopped me and said, 'This is the cleanest construction site I've ever seen.'

### RESTORING GRANDEUR

Patterson mentions another religious project that was challenging, but impressive; Loyola's Madonna Della Strada Chapel offers a striking example of how modern concerns must be considered when renovat-

ing older structures, while being careful to preserve the integrity and intended purpose of the original building. At the chapel at Loyola, Valenti's goal throughout the chapel renovation process was to restore the interior to its original grandeur and enhance and accentuate the



**The Madonna Della Strada Chapel**

artistic and architectural beauty of the structure, yet make it serve the needs of a modern congregation.

Valenti added an intricately designed marble floor (which features six distinct types of Italian marble), a dramatic lighting system, detailed plasterwork and ornamental iron, all of which work in synch with the original Art Deco design of the building.” He adds that one of the most rewarding aspects of the project was being able to renovate the extensive plasterwork and the marble floor, as those were items that were part of the original vision for the chapel, but were not able to be completed when the chapel was first built.

Yet, it was essential to remember that the chapel would be used by a modern congregation. The project had to balance the importance of preserving religious traditions with the practical considerations of being a viable place of worship in a modern world.

Sister Maxwell explains that when Valenti was working on the Sacred Heart project, the company was sensitive to the traditions inherent in a renovation project affiliated with a religious institution. “The major

project the company did for us was a 33,000-square-foot classroom addition to our 1928 building that includes 12 classrooms, two science labs, a library, a large meeting room and a playground on the roof.” She adds that the entire project reflected a respect for the integrity of the structure. “It’s a beautiful building; everyone is so pleased. They all rave about it.”

When Valenti, Sr., broke ground on that first lot on Roscoe Street, he may not have imagined the success his small company would come to realize, but he was fortunate to see his dream come true just the same. It is certain that he endowed his sons and associates with a strong sense of family and an unflinching dose of integrity and pride in a job well done that will serve them well as they move forward with the next 70 years. ■

For further information on Valenti Builders, Inc., please visit [www.valentibldrs.com](http://www.valentibldrs.com) or call Melinda Foukal, Marketing/Client Relations, Valenti Builders, Inc. at (847) 446-2200