

TMRC Hired to Restore Stone in Philadelphia Basilica for Pope's Visit



TMRC started restoration projects a few weeks prior to Pope Francis' visit to the U.S. Team member Mike McCormick is shown here cleaning the flamed granite steps in front of the cathedral.

Standing as a proud symbol of the Catholic faith for 169 years, the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has also stood the test of time. Nonetheless, it was in desperate need of cosmetic work for a very special reason. You see, by the time you read this, a once-in-a-lifetime visit by Pope Francis will have taken place, and let's face it, with the whole world watching, there's no second chance to make a first impression. Enter The Marble Restoration Company.

Located in Lafayette Hill, Pennsylvania, the folks at The Marble Restoration Company are not new to natural stone. They are, however, the new kids on the block, said Founder Rick Sirianni. "We've only been in business for 2 years. We work out of a very small building and all of our technicians work out of fully-stocked vans."

Doing stone repairs of all types, Rick and company specialize

in countertops, walls and floors. "One of the big reasons I started this company was because I was so upset with the lack of professionalism and service that I had experienced," Rick continued. "It seems to be ubiquitous. We need more education, more intelligence and more professionalism in this business."

A Few Details about the 169-Year-Old Landmark

Modeled after the Lombard Church of Saint Charles in Rome, Italy, the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul was designed by Philadelphia architect Napoleon LeBrun. The first cornerstone was laid on September 6, 1846. LeBrun also designed The Philadelphia Academy of Music, Saint Patrick's Roman Catholic Church, Saint Peter the Apostle Roman Catholic Church, Saint Augustine's Roman Catholic Church and St. John Chrysostom's Albanian Orthodox Church. LeBrun also designed some of the earliest skyscrapers,

Peter J. Marcucci

most notably the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company tower in New York City.

Being at the Right Place at The Right Time and Just Saying Yes!

Rick was standing in the lobby of one of his condominium projects. It was a high rise with a Carrara floor that needed lots of work, Rick explained: "They hired us to come in and restore the floor. It was filthy, with cracked tiles. It hadn't been taken care of for years, and we brought it back to life. They were thrilled with it, and we convinced them that they needed to put us on a monthly maintenance to keep it looking that way."

A bit later, Rick was meeting with the manager of the condo, standing there talking about some additional work, when a woman walked by. He explains in detail, "The woman was a resident. She and the manager knew each other and were joking back and forth. The manager then introduced us.

"So, what do you do?" the woman asked.

"I replied, 'I take care of these floors.'

"You mean you are the guy who actually takes care of these floors?"

"Yeah," I said.

"And you do marble?" she exclaimed.

"Yeah! That's what we do," I said.

"Would you be interested in looking at a piece of marble at the cathedral?"

"I'd be happy to," I said.

"I can't promise you anything," she continued, "but we have this outdoor statue — it's a crucifixion with other statues around it that everybody comes to look at, and we have to clean it up before the Pope comes."

The woman then identified herself as Mary Ann Leigh — an active volunteer parishioner at Saints Peter and Paul. What a coincidence!

Rick continues, "So later on, I went and looked at the statue with Mary Ann. It turns out that it wasn't marble at all — it was concrete with a coating on it. So I explained that it really only needed a good cleaning.

Photos provided by TMRC



The 169-year-old basilica was designed by the renowned American architect Napoleon LeBrun, and modeled after the Church of St. Charles in Rome. "This whole project has been very exciting. It's wasn't a big project, but it meant a lot to all of us to play a small part in this whole event," said TMRC founder Rick Sirianni.

"We'll show you what we can do," I said, and I sent over one of our techs. He used Majestic Deep Cleaning Stripper on a small area. Mary Ann just looked at it and said, "Yep, you're hired, do it! — And would you mind walking with me again?"

So Rick and Mary Ann took a tour of the cathedral, this time counting the holes in the Carrara marble walls.

"Can you fix these holes?" she asked.

"Yeah, we can do that." Soon after, the team got the project started when, again, Mary Ann approached Rick explaining that she now knows the path that the Pope

is going to take.

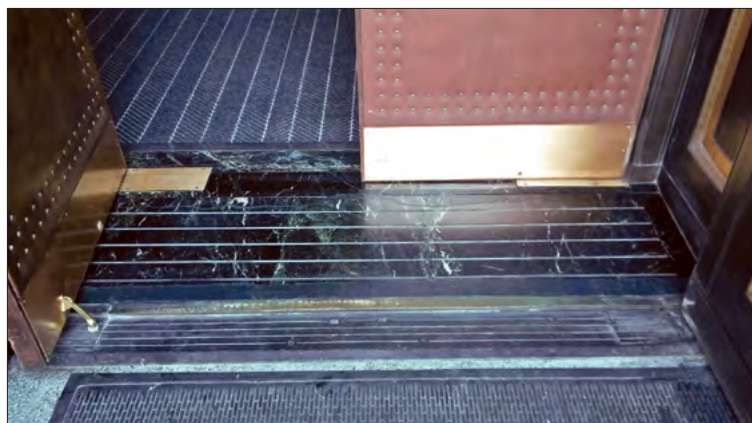
Rick continued, "So we started walking up the altar steps, saw a big crack and we just stopped and looked at each other laughing. I told her, "You know, we can't have the Pope tripping up these stairs — that wouldn't be good."

Mary Ann again asked, "Can you fix that?"

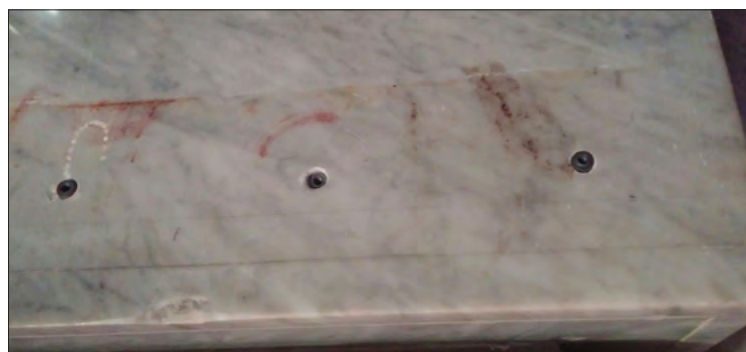
"Again I said, "Yes, we can fix that," all the while knowing that we have a policy that we never change a job scheduled.

"But I broke that rule, called our customers and told them the truth.

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One of 3 serpentine thresholds repaired in the main entrance. "We then walked out to the vestibule where there were 3 giant doors," explained Rick. "Underneath the doors there were 3 serpentine thresholds all beat to heck with cracks and jagged edges. I was surprised that someone hadn't tripped on them."



3 of 30 holes repaired in the Carrara marble. "There were repairs done a long time ago and done terribly. We had to drill them out and re-patch them correctly. Our guys really like K-Bond adhesives mixed with K-Bond paste colors for patching. They say it gives a more true and natural look to the stone," said Rick Sirianni.

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Everybody was happy to move their schedule around.”

Rick and company additionally were contracted for the restoration of 3 huge serpentine thresholds and flame-finished steps.

Renovation Key Issues

The team labored in the basilica for 2 weeks. It really wasn't a big job, but it was challenging work, Rick recalled. “We needed to show a lot of flexibility with them, because it was all last minute stuff. It was, ‘What about this — what about that?’”

“We were there and just said we'll do it, we'll stay flexible, and we'll do everything that we can. It really was a constant high for all of us, but the high point was just getting the job done.

“A big issue was repairing the holes in the walls. They were stained and dirty, and once we patched the holes, it was hard to match the surrounding area. We would have loved restoring all the panels, not just patching the holes, but we didn't have the time to do that. We instead had to dirty up the panels around the patchwork using concrete dyes. The priest that was in charge of it said, ‘Don't worry about polishing the area. We'll get that done after the Pope leaves.’”

“Another challenge was the serpentine thresholds. They were about 10 feet long and the repair work went deep. We first had to fill them in with concrete and then K-Bond. It was rainy and damp and the stone was hard to dry and reinstall. We did preserve



The wall to the left of this altar chair, where the Pope was seated, contained several holes repaired by The Marble Restoration Company's finest. The Papal visit was on Saturday September 26, 2015. Mass at the basilica was for the clergy by invitation only, then an outdoor mass on the parkway was held, where it was anticipated that a million people would attend.

the original design, though. That part was very important to them.

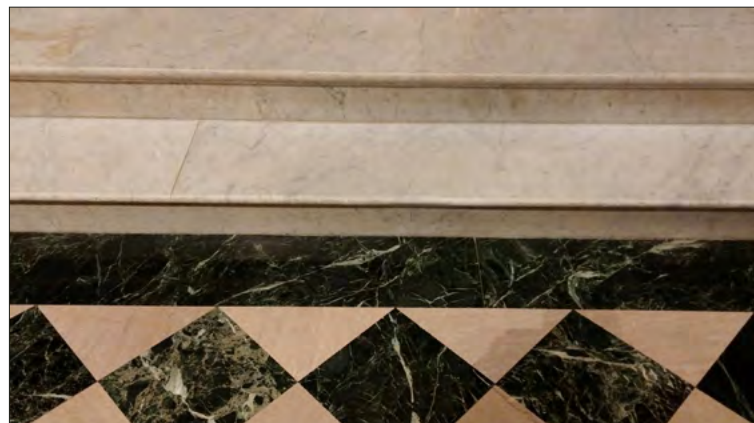
“The third challenge was cleaning the flame-finished steps. Overall, they cleaned up pretty good, but not completely. There was some deep, deep rust from the wrought iron fencing, and we just couldn't get all of it out. We tried rust removers and all the different cleaners, but none of them would do it. That was a little bit of a disappointment to us.”

As far as work restrictions, Rick said there weren't any until the last day when the secret service told them they needed to be out, as well as few scheduled weddings. The team finished on Tuesday 9-15-15, just one week before the Papal visit.

Education is One of The Marble Restoration Company's Primary Goals

“There are a few things that are very important to us,” explained Rick. “Quality and customer service. You can't join our organization unless you are committed to both of them, and if you bring quality and if you bring customer service to this company, you are going to make money.

“A third element is one of educating not only our staff, but our customers as well. Most people don't understand what we do. An example of this is that we get an awful lot of calls from people that think we're a janitorial company saying, ‘I need my marble cleaned’ or ‘I've got stains on my marble,’ when what they really have is etches. If we can educate



A virtually invisible repair to a huge chip on the steps to be used by the Pope was completed by both Chaz McFadden and Mike McCormick. According to Rick, employees own a small percentage of the company and are paid well. “We'll invest in people, we are willing to train and we pay above average because we want good people.”

our customers by showing them case studies of something similar to their problem and what needs to be done, then all the better. So I think that a smart consumer makes a great customer. The more we can educate people, the easier the job becomes, the easier it is to set expectations that can be met. I think it's an ongoing process that brings a higher level of professionalism to our trade.”

The Marble Restoration Company's service area spans from Wilmington, Delaware north, to Allentown, Pennsylvania, and from the New Jersey shore west to the western suburbs of Philadelphia. Employing just 8 people, the talented staff consists of 3 senior techs (with a combined total of 40 years experience), 3 junior techs and 2 sales administrators. Rick is, however, looking for a 7th and possibly an 8th technician, but it's difficult, he explained.

“It's a challenge to find an experienced person that will buy into our business philosophy. We treat our job like a craft and finding young workers that want to learn a craft is a challenge. Our 3 senior techs love the business, love what they do and love the end results of their efforts. They're the ones with the knowledge, and without them we wouldn't have a business.



Holes repaired in the Carrara marble wall cladding, where a railing was formerly bolted. TMRC restoration pros used a combination of K-Bond adhesives mixed with K-Bond paste colors for patching.

When we were doing the work at the cathedral, we had one guy that was so good at patching, repairing and color matching, that a person called him the Michelangelo of marble repair. His name is Chaz McFadden.

“Sometimes, however, those guys aren't the best communicators, but Brynn Fiel— our operations manager—is very good at communicating. We'll pick our techs brains for information and solutions, and the operations manager then figures out how to say it. So the job for us is to figure out how to communicate what they know and say in a way that makes sense to our customers.

“We are also a little more fastidious than other companies. We come up against a lot of competition, and when we lose an account it's typically because we believe we need to do more than what our competition believes. So I think we are fussier than our competition, and we're not going to change. We've also thought about lowering our prices, but where is that going to leave us? It makes us a ‘Me Too’ company, and we don't want to be a ‘Me Too’ company. If we cannot convince a customer that they need that extra step, then they should go with the cheaper guy. That's the biggest difference between us and the competition.”

A Conservative Approach to Marketing

Rick's sole advertising is a Google listing, and most of their business is acquired through word of mouth. He explained that for their larger accounts, they do direct, one-on-one marketing.

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"We know who they are, we know who the property management companies are and we know who the condos and hotels are, and we talk to them. We may send 4 or 5 emails to a prospective customer, but 3 of them are going to be about education, not about selling. Again, this is part of our educational approach."

Bright Prospects Through Due Diligence

Concluding, Rick continues, "We want to grow our business, and we see huge growth in contract maintenance in this area. The type of work we performed in the Cathedral is not normal. Half of our business is commercial restorations and monthly or quarterly maintenance. That's our base. The other half is residential countertops, foyers and bathrooms, and we are booked solid for the next 2 months. That may sound like a good thing, but it's really not, because most people don't want to wait so long. But we'd rather do that than hire people off the street."

"So our future focus is going to be on developing more talent by hiring and training more people. The more qualified people we have, the more business we can acquire while being the best in the industry. We've already got the reputation, but not many know about us yet."

Products supplied by Braxton-Bragg used in the St. Peter and St. Paul basilica restoration:

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- Majestic Deep Cleaning Stripper/Degreaser
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For more information about these products, visit www.Braxton-Bragg.com.

For more information about The Marble Restoration Company visit www.marblerestorationco.com.

Chaz McFadden and Mike McCormick work on repairing the steps that Pope Francis will ascend to reach the altar area in the basilica. Said Rick Sirianni, "When I stood at the altar and looked to the back of the church, it just felt good, not just from a business standpoint, but from the soul. All of us felt good that we participated a little bit in this great event. Every one of us will talk about this to our kids and remember this for the rest of our lives. We are proud of the job we did."

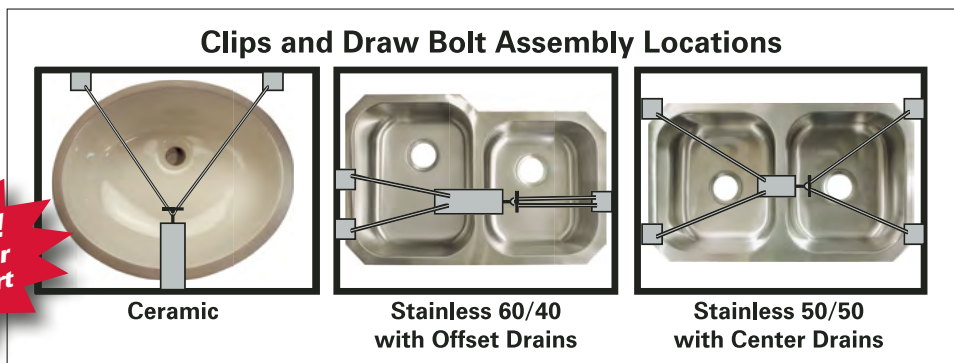
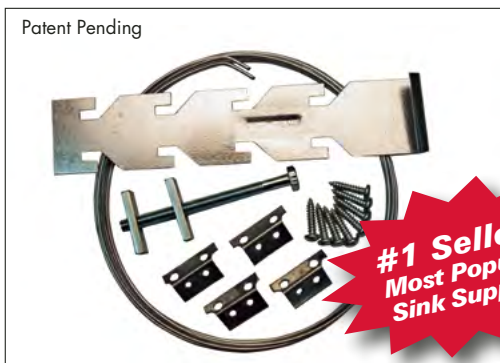


THE BEST preparation for good work tomorrow is to do good work today.

—Elbert Hubbard

American Author, 1859-1915

YOU'VE GOT TO SEE THIS VIDEO!

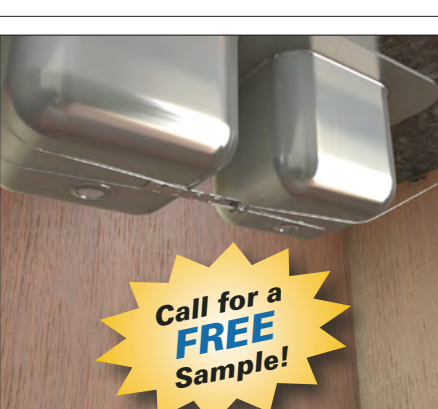


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