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**GRANGER CONSTRUCTION
COMPANY, INC**

GRANGER CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, INC.

BY SARAH HALL

COVER FEATURE



Microtel, Binghamton, NY

Les Granger has an affinity for construction.

“I enjoy building buildings,” Granger said, “and most of the people we build for today appreciate our passion for building. That’s kind of what our lives have been about.”

Granger and his wife Nancy are the founders of Granger Construction Company, Inc., in East Syracuse, NY. They started the company in 1992 as the San-Gra Corporation and then renamed it Granger in 2002. After years working in the construction field both as a tradesman and then in management positions for other companies, Les felt they should create a company based on good principles and lessons learned along the way

“I grew up on a farm, and when my parents offered the farm to all the kids, we all said no,” Granger said. “So the farm went, and I needed a job, so I went to work as a laborer.”

Granger initially trained as a mason, but, finding it not to his liking, instead turned to carpentry. After a few injuries, he found himself on the business side of construction. “The pencil replaced the tools,” Granger said. “That was very, very good for me. I’ve lucked out. I’ve had some great experiences. We have worked with some great people, and Nancy and I have enjoyed the process of building a successful construction company.



Granger Estimating Team- L-R: Tim Donovan, Ed Visconti



Interior of 614 South Crouse Avenue in Syracuse. University Area Apartments, William Reckmyer Architect and Owner

The Importance of Integrity

That passion has translated into a corporation that once spanned the entire East Coast and had offices in both East Syracuse and Mooresville, NC, a suburb of Charlotte. Granger mostly works with private clients in the retail, hospitality, entertainment, medical and general commercial markets. The majority of Granger's clients are in the private market as opposed to the public sector. "We have developed a lot of repeat customers." Granger's Vice President of Business Development Don Kowell offers an apt analogy:

"Construction is like a three- or a four-legged stool depending on how many key people are in it," Kowell said. "At a minimum you've got an owner, you've got an architect and you've got a contractor. When everybody knows what they're supposed to do, shares the same goals and has the integrity to hold up that seat, so to speak, the end result of the project can be a good experience for that team. This builds relationships."

"We strive to avoid adversarial relationships with all project members," Kowell said. "We just have a good core of people that focus on doing what we're supposed to do, and doing it right."

Having integrity is important to Granger Construction.

That integrity not only makes for good business relationships, but a better end result for the customer.

"We tend to attract the right subs that come to work with

us. If you've got challenges that need to be taken care of and you don't have to just worry about how cheap you can do it, picking the right people to do it — lofty ideas, mind you — it does make for a better result for us, the owner and everybody in the end," Kowell said. "Even subs will say that, in their past experiences working with us they get things done because we're very well organized. We hold them accountable for not only quality, but productivity and safety, and in the end, they say, 'You know, Granger helped us make this a good project.'

Granger Construction also strives to build good relationships with the architects.

"With respect to architects, we appreciate their responsibility and role in each project, and we strive to meet their expectations, as well," Kowell said. "Properly delivering what is on the documents is our approach to simply doing it right."

Rebuilding after the recession

Like many companies, when the market took a downturn in 2008, Granger found itself needing to do some restructuring.

"Charlotte, being the banking capital of the East Coast, was hard hit. We had developers of projects that just one day said, 'Stop, we're out of money,'" Kowell said. "And that was it. That ended a whole lot of relationships. We kept our Mooresville office going for a while, but the local business climate was not favorable. The northeast and Central New York continued to provide a better business opportunity for us."



Empower Federal Credit Union, Auburn, NY

“In 2008 retail didn't slow down in the development business, it pretty much stopped,” Granger said. “We went from \$50 million to nothing overnight. Since we were heavily invested as a retail contractor, it was a tough battle. We managed our way through and successfully branched out into several new markets.”

The company shifted its focus from retail by branching out into urban development, hospitality, entertainment, and commercial buildings. Hotels and the hospitality market have made up a large portion of their business.

“Our people then and now have a variety of experience from their career experiences that we have tapped into,” Kowell said. “That is what makes Granger so versatile in what we can do for owners or developers.”

In the years since 2008, Granger has streamlined its footprint. Instead of the entire East Coast, the company focuses on building within about a six-hour radius of Syracuse; they're currently working on a Dave and Buster's in the Washington, D.C., area, as well as other structures like hotels in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Maryland.

“These regions have always been a strong market for us,” Granger said.

Repeat clients are important to Granger, and the Dave and Busters project is just one example. It's their third one now. They have also built five Microtel Inn & Suites under the Wyndham brand. No two projects are the same however, while some elements may be duplicated as dictated by corporate mandate, each project is hardly identical to the others.

While Granger's portfolio lists dozens of retail locations along the East Coast, Granger is looking to focus the company's work efforts a little closer to home.

“We are now doing a lot more in the local market,”

Granger said. “In the past there have been a lot of projects that we would fit in with here but we haven't focused on them.”

The company does have several notable projects in the Central New York market. Highlighted projects include:

614 S. Crouse Ave. Syracuse. This project involved the conversion of the former Rosewood nursing home, a six story building, into 94 apartments for students at Upstate Medical Center and Syracuse University. This type of project is typical of the booming urban apartment development in Central New York, which often includes repurposing buildings. “This is something Granger has experience with,” Kowell said.

Empower Federal Credit Union, Auburn, NY. “Here we took on the challenge of a total renovation of a historically sensitive building,” Kowell said. “By teaming up with the owner and architect, we accomplished the goal of creating a beautiful building that preserves its integrity along with function for its new purpose.” Kowell said the project highlights Granger's attention to detail and teamwork

Bass Pro Shops, Utica NY. Granger oversaw the creation of a new sporting goods store within a vacant retail structure. Its total renovation and special finish treatments are unique. The project also included a construction of a new building for sales, service and repair of boats.

Dicks Sporting goods store at Destiny USA. The two-story project was a complete new build-out constructed under a fast track schedule. It was completed in record time.

Microtel Inn & Suites, Binghamton, NY. This is a three-story, 57-room project. This is just one example of the many hotels Granger has built in the northeast for hospitality developers.

In the past, Granger Construction oversaw several



Dave & Busters, Rochester, NY



Aspen Dental, Cicero, NY

well-known local projects, including the original Dey Bros. Building renovation, the conversion of several buildings in Hanover Square to apartments and retail, the conversion of the former Hill Haven nursing home on Genesee Street to the Bradford Luxury Apartments and various projects at SUNY Health Science Center.

The company is eager to take on more local jobs — but Granger and Kowell both said it has to be the right kind of job.

“I think the one thing we pride ourselves on is to look at a project or an opportunity in the best interest of both us and the client to say, is this a good fit for us?” Kowell said. “Number one, can we price it properly due to time? Number two, do we have the right project management capability and supervision available at the time when the customer wants to bid it and build it? And then number three, if those things all fit then, yeah, we’ll go for it, or [say] I’m sorry, we’ll have to pass. It’s painful sometimes to say no to bid a job when someone called you up. But if you can’t service the client, why waste everyone’s time?”

Granger is continuing its focus on moving deeper into the field of medical office construction, student housing, redevelopment and other current trends.

“We have the experience in it,” Granger said. “So, we’ve started to diversify ourselves reasonably well.”

Growing Granger into the future

As Granger Construction moves into the future, Les Granger plans to move with it for as long as he can.

“I don’t ever intend to retire. I do intend to back off, and I have, considerably,” he said. “But at some point, I won’t be here, and they may make some other decisions. But right now, the goal isn’t to grow the company real big. What we have done is add people in just the right places to maximize our capabilities. Granger is well-balanced right now as the right size company that fits the demands of

private construction in this region. We have a great group of people.”

In the last few years, in response to client needs, the company has added staff to its estimating, project management and field supervision departments, as well as a full-time safety officer.

“The additional staff has enabled us to provide even better quality service to our clients,” Kowell said. “The added factor of a full-time safety officer on board provides constant training and planning for both Granger employees as well as subcontractors. This adds value to each project we do and enhances the overall quality throughout the construction process.”

The company will continue to focus on doing what it has always done: providing good, timely, honest service to its clients.

Kowell said the company learned a good deal from the past recession and has applied that knowledge going forward.

“I think one of our successes is the fact that we’ve taken the time to examine what we do best, learn to say no sometimes and take your best shot at what you know you can do best and deliver the best with integrity, quality people and client service.”

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Granger Construction team: seated L-R : Tom Pape, Chris Montrose standing L-R: Walter Bock, Mike Eger

GRANGER CONSTRUCTION...

A PRINCIPLE-BASED COMPANY.

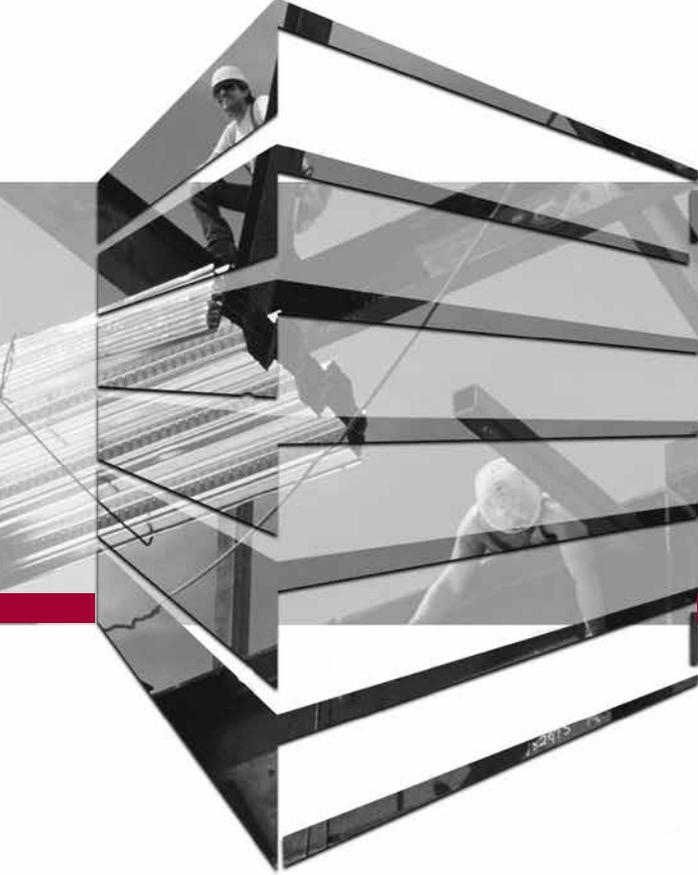
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