

SLIPPERY ROCK

GAZETTE

THE BEACON OF THE STONE INDUSTRY www.slipperyrockgazette.net

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Taking Care of Business (and Installers!)

MY first day as a fabricator was sometime in 1985. There were very few safety aids available for shops or jobsites in those days. Cut pieces were hand-carried throughout every stage, and then loaded on a pickup truck. When arriving at the jobsite, pieces were either brought in on a dolly or cart, a small device with two small wheels, or just hand-carried, while steps and stairways were traversed with a tight grip, a strong back, and a deep grunt. Needless to say, everyone who worked there was strong and dedicated to getting it done.

As the years passed, the folks who stayed grew more efficient at creating quality work. What nobody saw, especially the installers, however, was that all those years of heavy lifting were slowly and quietly taking its toll on their bodies. Yes, our installers were finding better ways to finish their work, but hardly any effort was put into finding better ways to move materials into the customer's home. **Those installers, who'd now grown into super installers and able to say yes to any problem, had bodies that were now saying "No!"** Their backs, shoulders, wrists and knees had had enough, and many were facing an untimely early retirement. All that knowledge, patience and skill would walk (or hobble) away, and the learning cycle, along with hundreds of mistakes, would begin again.

Now fast forward to 2024. Wow, how have things changed! Breakthroughs and inventions to improve safety are aplenty, and careers that might have ended early for us old timers, are now extended decades into the future by progressive shops willing to invest in the latest safety equipment. One of those progressives who continue to lead the industry in safety is Aaron Crowley, a former countertop shop owner, and long-time safety equipment developer, writer, and now pod caster. Crowley has been a true safety advocate from the get-go, when he opened Crowley's Granite & Quartz

by Peter J. Marcucci

Photos Courtesy No Lift Systems

in Tualatin, Oregon in 1998. Aaron has also recently been made Chairman of The Natural Stone Institute Safety Committee, and as you'll see, he's not afraid to speak his mind.

"What we're up against is an old school mentality that still believes it is okay to expect another human being to sacrifice their health and future quality of life for an install job that may only last a few years. Some companies are oblivious to it, and some just don't care, enough to change. Unfortunately, the inevitable result of this mentality is an ever-shrinking pool of qualified installers.

"If you do the math, an 85 square-foot kitchen weighs about 1,330 pounds. If a crew picks those countertops up to load their rig, picks them up again to unload the rig, and then picks them up again to set them on the cabinets, that's lifting over 4,000 pounds per day, 20,000 pounds per week. That's over a million pounds per year in cumulative lifting! So when you're trying to attract employees to install for you, it's an uphill battle trying to find people who are willing to work that hard and take that risk for installer wages. The easiest way to solve this problem is to protect the installers who you already employ, so you don't lose them due to a lifting-related injury."

The Alternative

Crowley, not being a guy who just talks the talk, walked the walk to his drawing board. He built many prototypes that were extensively tested in the field by his own install crew before coming up with a working design to facilitate the safe transporting and lifting of slab counters, no matter the jobsite conditions.

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Aaron Crowley with a very happy crew at Block Tops Anaheim, CA. Nate Kolenski, owner of Block Tops is a pioneer in the stone industry, outfitting all his install crews with No Lift Systems.

BB Industries Celebrates 30 Years of Excellence with 30 for 30 Theme

BB Industries has a lot to celebrate in 2024. Headquartered in Knoxville, Tennessee, BB Industries has provided quality tools and supplies to the stone and tile industries for 30 years, and January 2024 will mark the company's year-long anniversary celebration of 30 ways it has impacted, contributed to and changed the stone industry.

It's not just a celebration of the business, though. CEO Rick Stimac said it's a celebration of the people, including staff, clients and supplier partners, all who have contributed to BB Industries' longevity and continued success. "Everybody talks about how important people are, but I think sometimes in companies that's lost.

We do a really good job of living that. We're blessed with great people here, and the family atmosphere we've cultivated. One affirmation is that for 3 years running, we've received a Top Places to Work award for our region. So this is a 30th anniversary celebration of us and our partners. That's how we make the customer delight and everything we're able to make happen every day," Stimac said.

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Taking Care of Business

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Finally, Crowley's No Lift Install System was fleshed-out, tested, modified, tested again, patented and put into production. As you'll see in the captioned photos, the system has many great benefits, and has been a great success, and there's even an updated version for 2024. Here's why it's been a hit with the industry.

The two main features of the No Lift Install System are the frame lifting mechanism and the rotating mechanism. The lifting mechanism is a remote controlled 12v actuator. This is what lifts the countertop to cabinet height. Once the countertop is at the approximate cabinet height, the frame that holds the countertop is unlocked and rotated into the horizontal position and locked into place. Then, after the final height is set, using the remote control, a security hook (called the Sheppard Hook) is released, allowing the countertop to easily roll on to the cabinet by means of 20 transfer balls that sit just above the frame. The transfer balls make for a very stable yet frictionless surface.

Other features of the No Lift Install System are the automatic drop-away feet that facilitate placement onto the cabinet when a countertop is transported with the wall edge down instead of up. As for wheels and castors, this is where the rubber meets the road, explained Aaron. "We found that the weight and the stress that a granite countertop puts on those castors wears them out over time, and they become fatigued and unstable. They also don't



The No Lift expands the labor pool, enabling women to join the ranks of highly skilled slab installers, something utterly unheard of in the past.

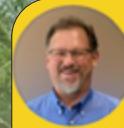
pivot well when worn, and when you're in a small kitchen trying to turn in all directions, you need to have precise control. So the low friction, locking castors we use, each have a 3,500 pound weight capacity, even though we are only putting from 600 to 900 pounds on the cart. As for tires, they are non-marring and non-binding. We tested every wheel, tire and castor known to mankind, and wound up with 10 inch by 4 inch solid rubber tires made by a company called Ameritire from Arizona. These tires were developed exclusively for situations

like installations and designed to go going over curbs, rocks, thresholds, cords and drop cloths. They are perfectly designed for what we do."

As for options, there's a whole slew of really cool accessories. One of particular interest is called the Roll-A-Ramp that's made out of aluminum. It's great for those extra-long steps or that freshly poured concrete walkway that the supervisor forgot to tell you about on installation day. It weighs 55 pounds, has a 900 pound capacity, and is easily transportable. It is also infinitely expandable using the optional extensions. Another is the Edge Slider, used for installing laminated or mitered edge countertops. Trust me, the list of cool stuff goes on.

Changing an Industry Mindset

"There's a laundry list of ways that the old school lift and carry approach costs the company in the short term and the long term," continued Aaron. "In the short term, companies will send extra installers or redeploy other install crews to help get heavy and awkward counters installed. Sometimes, they break large or fragile countertops that otherwise wouldn't have broken had they used the No Lift Install System. As for the long term, it's very common that after four or five years of lifting, an installer recognizes what's happening to



Top fan
Ed Young

We used to think that you weren't a man if you needed a mechanical device to help you install. Now we know better! Real Men don't destroy their bodies! Real Men work smart so they can have a long career! Real Men work smart so they can still enjoy their time away from work! Real Men want to be able to lift their kids and their grandkids when they get old. Installers deserve to have the tools that help them preserve their health! No installer retires before his time!



Designed with installer safety in mind, the Power Tilt No Lift cart uses out-rigger supports to stabilize, rotate and help installers easily move large islands into position.

his body and he quits before his health is completely destroyed. Well, you just lost an highly-skilled installer after years of training. That's an unimaginable expense for the company.

"Additionally, you also have a compounding effect, because there's a labor shortage right now. This shortage is across all industries, and not unique to stone fabrication. So as an employer, if the number one qualification for a prospective installer is they've got to be as strong as a football lineman, they're going to think, 'Man, this is hard work! Do I really want to do this day in and day out?!'

"This is a huge problem right now for shops. Unfortunately, too many shop owners don't want to admit that this is a problem.

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The Roll-a-Ramp aluminum accessory makes navigating steps even easier.



Taking Care of Business

POWER TILT

- 900# Weight Capacity *
- 55" Max Safe Counter Height *
- Actuator Powered Tilt
- Actuator Powered Lift
- Powered by Dewalt Lithium Battery -20v Zamp (2 batteries and charger included)
- Retractable Tilt Supports *
- Outrigger Supports
- Industrial Remote FOB
- "Easy Turn" Solid Wheels
- 3500# "Kingpin" Castors

www.NoLiftSystem.com

*Using large loads is dangerous and requires great caution and care. Refer to the Owners Manual for safe handling guidelines.

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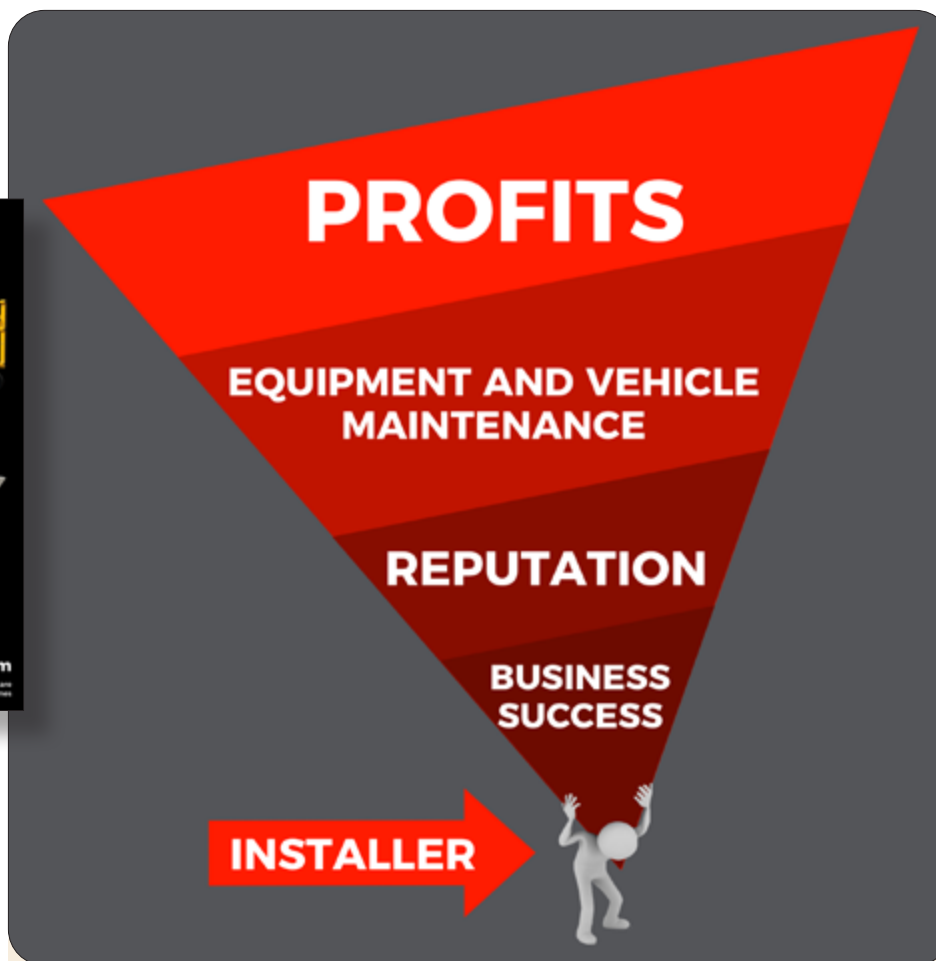
They really struggle to see the correlation between a highly-skilled guy who can install or fix and job in the field, and the inevitable fact that the wear and tear on his body is going to catch up with him. That employer is going to lose a skilled craftsman, and that craftsman is going to lose his career. It's a tragedy in my opinion, and our goal at No Lift is to change that industry mindset by presenting a better way, so that highly skilled craftsmen can continue to practice their trade and their employers can prosper."

Crowley believes that the status quo isn't sustainable and that eventually, all countertops will be installed using mechanical devices like the No lift..

"Once you come to grips with the fact that it's not okay to ask somebody to make this kind of sacrifice, the follow-up changes are easy decisions to make. Once you've got one of our carts in the field, you're not going to break countertops, you're going to have fewer injuries, and you're going to significantly reduce the labor needed to get big countertops installed on site."

"Some companies get it, and they will willingly invest in equipment like the No Lift to protect their installers and protect their profits.

"For those who don't get it, they will continue to suffer the loss of skilled employees, broken counters, and excess labor costs...and in the end, they will be forced to make this change merely to survive."

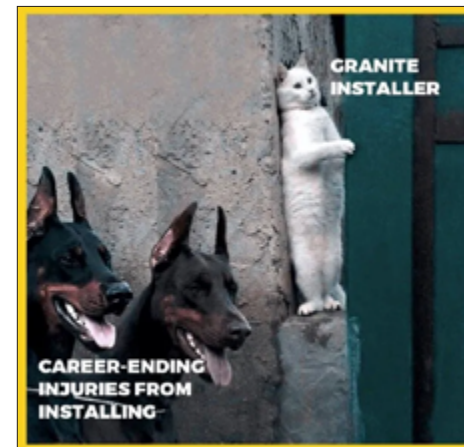


"Every stone shop literally depends on whether its installers can get the counters installed in the client's home. If you can't get the counters installed, you don't have a stone business."

In closing, it's clear, that if the stone fabrication industry as a whole doesn't make the choice to take better care of its employees, state and federal regulators will. Just look at the silicosis issue in California. Preventing back injuries and silicosis are big issues in the news these days, and are looming priorities that companies are facing. If Stone industry companies aren't proactive about taking responsibility for the safety of their workers, someone else will step in, and you might not like it.

For more information on safety and the No Lift Install System, go to www.noliftsystem.com or watch the over 200 videos at <https://www.youtube.com/@noliftsystem>.

Guys in the field clearly love their carts. A frequent comment is, "I can't imagine working without one, now."



Educating through humor: No Lift has developed dozens of clever memes to get the point across. In addition, No Lift's Youtube channel has over 200 videos highlighting the No Lift cart in action.



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“I learned long ago, never to wrestle with a pig. You get dirty,
and besides, the pig likes it.” — *George Bernard Shaw*

BB Industries Celebrates 30 Years

Continued from page 1

30 for 30 Great Things to Celebrate

Stimac said the company is planning 30 more years on the cutting edge of the stone industry, both by looking back on the company's history and planning for the future. “I think many firsts happened because of BB Industries, whether it was offering superior customer service to the industry, being the first to offer an unbeatable satisfaction guarantee and shipping guarantee, combined with value pricing that helps and supports the fabricators, or understanding what we can do to bring education to the industry by having the industry's first and sole remaining monthly print publication, the *Slippery Rock Gazette*.

“For 30 years, we've been around through the good times and the bad times of this industry. We've also been willing to drive new things in the industry by supporting innovation and new technology. We're not resting on our laurels. So this year at TISE 2024 (The International Surface Event) will be our first big opportunity for us to communicate to the industry the 30 ways (and more) we've supported the industry, and the things we continue to do to help fabricators. We're known industry-wide for developing great customer relationships and bringing efficiencies that no one else in the industry does. We are also becoming



BB Industries released its 2024 product catalog this month.

known for the awesome Partner Appreciation Party we sponsor at TISE for our customers and vendors partners!”

Visit BB Industries at booth 3823 at TISE, January 24-26, Las Vegas, Nevada.

Since its beginning in 1994, BBI's philosophy has been to offer the best customer service in the industry and the best value stone fabrication products. We are right there for our customers through all phases of business with education, training, and support from CNCs to blades. Our vendors and customers are valued partners. For more info, visit BBIndustriesLLC.com, and BBIndustriesLLC on social media channels LinkedIn, Instagram, and facebook.com/BBIndustriesLLC. USA.

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“It was a good week. I didn't have to deny any wrongdoing once!”

Industry Calendar of Events

January 2024

The International Surface Event (TISE) | StonExpo

When: January 24-26, 2024

Where: Las Vegas, Nevada

Visit www.intlsurfaceevent.com for information and to register.

C: Next 2024, Sponsored by Cosentino

When: January 30, 2024 to February 3, 2024

Where: Los Cabos, Mexico

Visit <https://www.cosentinonext.com/agenda/> for information and to register.

February 2024

ISFA: C: Next 2024,

When: Thursday, Feb 1, 2024 to Saturday, Feb. 3

Where: Los Cabos, Mexico

Visit <https://www.cosentinonext.com/agenda/> for information and to register.

KBIS Show

When: Tuesday, February 27, to Thursday, February 29, 2024

Where: Orlando, Florida

Visit <https://kbis.com> for more information and to register.

March 2024

Women In Stone's Block Talk: Work/Life Balance

When: Tuesday, March 19, 2pm to 3pm

Where: Zoom Presentation

Visit naturalstoneinstitute.org/calendar for more information.

Other regional and online event opportunities are available through the industry association websites listed above.

FOCUS ON SAFETY EDUCATION

NSI to Present Live Silica & Slab Safety Certificate Session at StonExpo

The Natural Stone Institute will present a live version of their new Silica & Slab Safety Certificate on Tuesday, January 23 from 1:00pm-5:00pm at StonExpo at TISE in Las Vegas.

During this session, attendees will learn the key components of a stone fabrication safety

program and gain insights into safe slab handling and reducing exposure to respirable crystalline silica (RCS). Fabrication shop owners, safety managers, and other key employees will leave with the tools needed to improve workplace safety, maintain OSHA compliance, and train employees to ensure a safe and secure work environment for the entire team. This four-hour session offers stone professionals

a way to earn the Silica & Slab Safety Certificate in a reduced amount of time and in a live setting where they can actively ask questions and learn from experts and their peers.

NSI Accreditation & Technical Manager Mark Meriaux, who will facilitate the session, commented: "We know that keeping workers safe from respirable crystalline silica is front of mind for many natural stone fabricators. This session will be a helpful way for fabricators to make sure they understand the best practices for preventing silicosis and have the resources they need to make sure everyone on staff is as safe as possible."

To register for the live session, visit www.intlsurfaceevent.com.



INTRODUCING

Natural Stone Catalogue

This catalogue is a collection of images and material details to help buyers identify appropriate natural stone materials for their projects.

Developed by the North American Quarry Advocacy Group.

Powered by the Natural Stone Institute.

Find out more:
stones.naturalstoneinstitute.org

The International Surface Event (TISE): SURFACES | StonExpo | TileExpo is the largest North American Surface Event and has served nearly 30 years as an industry marketplace for floor covering, stone, and tile businesses to come together, seek products and services, build relationships, and develop their businesses. For more information, please visit www.intlsurfaceevent.com. To view the sponsors of TISE, visit the industry association page on the event website.

StonExpo, the event for discovering stone, natural stone, stone cutting equipment, tools, and machinery in North America, is a mega event underneath The International Surface Event (TISE) branding and is sponsored by the Natural Stone Institute and the Natural Stone Council. Your ticket to TISE provides you access to the full StonExpo exhibit hall, features, and resources.

"The object of a New Year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul and a new nose; new feet, a new backbone, new ears, and new eyes. Unless a particular man made New Year resolutions, he would make no resolutions. Unless a man starts afresh about things, he will certainly do nothing effective."

— Gilbert K. Chesterton

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Could You Use an Additional Ten Percent Production Capacity?

Would you like to be able to process 10% more square footage through your plant every day—without capital investment, without adding people, and without working additional hours?

You can get that very quickly if you apply the simple principles outlined in this article.

You might be in the fabrication business but, at its core, your company is in business to perform value-added services that your customers are willing to pay for. They are willing to pay you for transforming slabs of granite (or other material) into countertops for their home or business. Your customers value that transformation. That's what they pay you to do.

The pure definition of value added is the physical transformation of material into something the customer is willing to pay for.

Everything else is non-value added. The maximum amount of square footage that your plant can process in a day is defined by the quantity of value-added hours that you execute that day. A value-added process would be something like the work done at a saw. Tasks like ordering slabs or repairing chips, while necessary to do, are non-value added.

The goal is to eliminate or reduce the time spent on non-value-added activities.

While processing stone through the saw is a value-added process step, not every activity performed at the saw is value added. *The only value-added portion of this process step is when the blade is actually cutting the stone.* Everything else is non-value added.

This includes programming the machine, loading the slab, unloading the cut pieces, cleaning the machine. All these activities may be necessary, but they are not value added. The ideal solution is to eliminate those activities. This can be challenging for the saw operation.

Ed Young
Fabricator's Business Coach

However, if you work at it, you can find ways to reduce the time required to do those activities.

TIP: To give you an idea how much time is spent on NVA at the saw, stand there and watch the saw run. Use your wristwatch or cell phone to track the time the blade is in the stone compared to the total time you are there. The results may surprise you.

Eliminating or reducing the time for performing non-value-added activities frees up the capacity of the people and machines you already have so they can perform more value-added activities.

RECAPTURE 10% OF YOUR CAPACITY TODAY



TIM WOODS

- T**ransportation – Moving product from one place to another.
- How many carts do you have? How many forklifts do you have? How many cranes do you have? They are all moving product from one place to another.
 - How many people do you have who spend time moving product around the plant?
 - How far do the parts travel? It can be an eye-opening exercise to actually measure the number of feet a piece of stone travels through your facility.
 - How often do you move things just to get them out of the way or to move them aside so something else can use that space? How much time do your folks spend doing that?

- I**nventory – Material or product that is in your plant but is not having value added work done to it right now.
- Inventory correlates directly to lead time. Higher levels of inventory equals longer lead time. To shorten your lead time, you need to lower the amount of Work In Process (WIP) inventory.
 - How many jobs do you have in process from template to install? Are all of them being worked on right now? Is every piece from every job having value added work done to it right now?
 - Add up all the pieces from all the jobs in your plant and then count the ones that are having value added work being done to them at that moment. All the pieces that aren't having value added work done to them are unnecessarily extending your lead time.
 - Ask yourself why those pieces are not being worked on. Also ask yourself how many pieces you can reasonably process at any given time.
 - You are not making fine wine or cheese. This inventory does not get better with age. How often have you had a piece get damaged while sitting on a cart? How often have you had a customer make a change to a job after you already cut the slab? Nothing good comes from this inventory sitting still.

- M**otion – Excess movement by people
- This includes:
 - People picking up and moving products and supplies
 - People walking to get supplies or information
 - Loading or unloading a workstation
 - Reaching for or walking to get tools and supplies (think installers)
 - Excessive reaching or turning
 - Heavy lifting

This document was developed to help you find ways to free up capacity (page 2 shown). It details eight categories of NVA activities with definitions and examples. You can use it as you walk around the plant to discover capacity you can free up.

I've developed a spreadsheet to help you track the opportunities you uncover, and to document the improvements you implement. It will also help you calculate the amount of capacity you are freeing up.

Category	Description	Examples	Issue Observed	Proposed Solution	Minutes Reduced	Repeats per Day	Minutes per Day Reduced	Total Minutes per Day	Annual Capacity Freed Up
T	Transportation	Moving materials, information, or tools from one place to another	- Moving parts with a fork lift - Carrying parts or tools from one place to another - Carrying paperwork from one place to another						
I	Inventory	Any parts, information, tools that are more than what is immediately needed	- Having parts waiting on a cart while one part is being cut on a machine - Having a month's worth of consumables stored at a work station - Having carts full of parts sitting in the shop with nothing being done to the parts						
M	Motion	Excess reaching and handling by a person to get tools, materials, operate equipment, etc.	- Reaching high overhead to obtain supplies from a shelf - Stooping to retrieve a tool from the lower shelf of a tool cart - Walking from the customer's kitchen to the retail truck to get a tool						
W	Waiting	People, machines, or product waiting for any reason	- A machine waiting on material to arrive - An operator waiting on clarification of which sink solvent to make - Parts sitting on a cart waiting to be run on the CNC						
O	Overproduction	Making more of anything than what is immediately needed	- Putting orders in the shop for production earlier than is needed - Cutting all the parts for one order on the saw before moving that order to the CNC						
O	Overprocessing	Additional changes to the product that are not required by the customer	- Polishing the edge for a hotel vanity to the same finish as for a high end custom home - Continuing to polish a chip repair that already meets quality standards						
D	Defects	Incorrect information, a product made incorrectly, damage to a product	- Putting the wrong sink model on an order - Cutting a top from the wrong slab - Drilling a splash						
S	Skills	Fully utilize all of the abilities that your employees bring to work with them every day.	Skills are not a Non-Value-Added activity. This is a reminder that your employees have lots of skills. If you tap into those skills to help you address the challenges above, you will get better solutions and also create stronger buy-in for the changes.						

Executing this well across your plant can easily free up 10% additional capacity in your plant.

To help you look for more ways to reduce non-value-added time, I have put together a detailed document and an easy to use spreadsheet that gives you more examples of VA and NVA along with a simple way to track the changes you are making.

These tools are available free on the Free Tools tab of my website, www.FabricatorsCoach.com.

In addition to having run a countertop fabrication shop, Ed has also helped many fab shop owners become very successful. He is a seasoned manufacturing manager and coach who has helped hundreds of companies from single person startups to large international corporations. As a former business owner, he understands the responsibility to make payroll while also satisfying customers. Ed can be reached at Ed@FabricatorsCoach.com.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Six Key Principles for Growing Your Business in 2024

AS we enter a new year, many of you might be eyeing growth and scaling your business. I feel it's important to challenge conventional thinking and dispel the myths that can surround growth.

Economic downturns, for example, are often seen as barriers to growth. However, these periods can present opportunities for strategic investments and gaining a competitive edge. It's important to understand that growth can be intentionally driven, rather than solely dependent on market forces.

In this article I share the six principles we follow for strategic growth. We've used these principles both in our own business and when working with our private clients. They include setting bold and grounded goals, achieving growth through incremental steps, sustaining continuous growth, executing rigorously, leveraging measurement as an advantage, and prioritizing capability building.

1. Setting Bold and Grounded Goals

The impact of Covid-19 has significantly influenced business data, making traditional methods of setting growth targets unreliable. It's important to recognize that the numbers from the past several years may not accurately reflect the future landscape.

Our alternative approach to strategic growth is to base our goals on the fundamental elements of our business that are within our control. Instead of relying solely on external market forces or inaccurate historic numbers, we can set ambitious targets by focusing on factors such as operational efficiency, diversifying revenue channels, product innovation, and talent development. By maximizing these internal strengths and continuously improving upon them, we can drive significant growth.

2. Achieving Growth Through Incremental Steps

While a single, game-changing breakthrough is appealing, sustainable growth in the countertop industry is often achieved through a series of small, strategic steps.

Justin Shaw
Stone Fabricator Elite

We typically start by identifying our key revenue drivers and applying best practices to each. This could involve optimizing marketing strategies, enhancing sales team performance, or developing a partnership to add a new division or revenue channel. The focus should be on stacking up these small wins for a significant cumulative impact.

We also find that we're able to accelerate our growth when members throughout the organization have ownership over specific outcomes. One of the keys to gaining that ownership, is to have your team co-create the vision and growth goals for the business.

3. Build Your Growth Plan for The Long Term

Long-term sustainable success and the ability to scale consistently, requires ongoing evergreen growth initiatives. We prefer to create three categories to include a mix of quick wins (short term), medium-term improvements, and long-term strategic planning. The goal is to establish a cycle of continuous growth, with each initiative feeding into the next. Quick wins are particularly valuable as they provide immediate financial benefits and boost team morale and confidence—creating momentum from which you can build on.

4. Execute With Efficiency

Well-planned growth strategies will fall short without effective implementation. Here is the process we use to ensure we execute at a high-level and stay on track day in and day out: We break down our long-term growth game plan into an annual plan, then chunk it down into quarterly and monthly plans. We identify the Most Important Tasks (MITs) required on a weekly basis to execute the tasks, initiatives, and projects. We also appoint a team member to be dedicated to act as the quarterback; this person provides playbooks for all key team members on a weekly basis.



5. What Gets Measured Gets Managed

In the context of successfully executing a growth strategy, it is crucial to understand the importance of measurement and management.

By tracking and evaluating relevant metrics, such as customer preferences, market conditions, and the impact of marketing campaigns, businesses can make informed decisions and adjust their growth initiatives accordingly. This data-driven approach enables them to identify areas of improvement, capitalize on opportunities, and mitigate risks.

Furthermore, by embracing digital metrics and industry benchmarks, businesses can gain valuable insights into their performance and compare it to industry standards. This allows them to benchmark their growth efforts and identify areas where they need to improve or excel.

Incorporating measurement into the execution of a growth strategy also helps in setting realistic goals and targets. By having a clear understanding of where the business stands and what needs to be achieved, teams can align their efforts and focus on the most impactful initiatives.

Ultimately, effective measurement and management provide businesses with the ability to monitor progress, make data-backed decisions, and pivot when necessary. It ensures that growth initiatives stay on track and that resources are allocated efficiently to drive significant and sustainable growth.

6. Prioritizing & Amplifying Talent

Talent is often an underutilized resource for countertop businesses. By investing in amplifying capabilities and skills, such

as technical and analytical skills, digital marketing, sales strategies, and customer experience, businesses can create more leverage. Practical, hands-on training is particularly effective in building the necessary capabilities. There are industry resources and workshops on software, sales training tailored to the unique aspects of countertop products, or customer service enhancement programs that can help businesses tap into the full potential of their talent.

If you are aiming for substantial growth in 2024 and beyond, you might be a good fit for our signature Growth Engine in 90-Days Program. We will assist you in developing a winning strategy, implementing the necessary systems for sustainable growth, and enhancing your team, culture, and performance. You can reach out to me directly at justin@stone-fabricatorelite.com.

Stone Fabricator Elite assists highly motivated and ambitious countertop companies in expanding and growing their business, while also empowering owners to have greater control, profitability, and freedom.

“In times of change learners inherit the earth; while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists.”
– Eric Hoffer

TRAINING & EDUCATION

A 2024 Digital Marketing Plan for Countertop Shops



IN 2023, countertop shops had a pretty good start to the year, with lots of folks wanting kitchen and bathroom makeovers. But as we got into summer, things began to slow down a bit, and it's been a bit up and down since then. It's not the COVID rush anymore and we are back to pre-2020 times. The unstable economy doesn't help, so shops have a lot to consider rolling into 2024!

We need to come up with a solid plan to make things more predictable and keep those leads coming in steadily. I'm going to lay out what you can do in order to make 2024 a bit more predictable in terms of countertop shop leads and projects.

Let's first talk about your website. I still see so many shop sites that are very

Stephen Alberts
Countertop Marketing Co.

outdated and not on point. This is the foundation of your business. In 2024 your goal should be to have a very solid foundation and website. If you do not, you will lose to the competition in your area.

Your Shop's Website

Optimize for Local Search: Make sure your shop's website is well-optimized for local search engine optimization. Include relevant keywords like "countertop shop near me" and create location-specific content. This helps your site show up when local customers are searching for countertops near them.

Showcase Your Work: Create a portfolio section on your website to showcase your best countertop installations. High-quality images and descriptions of completed projects can give potential customers a sense of your craftsmanship and style.

Easy-to-Use Contact Information: Ensure that your contact information, including your phone number and showroom address, is prominently displayed on your website. Consider adding a contact form for online quotes, making it easy for visitors to reach out. It must be very EASY for them to contact you. You don't want potential customers searching around!

Customer Reviews and Testimonials: Include customer reviews and testimonials

on your website. Positive feedback from satisfied clients builds trust and credibility. Encourage happy customers to leave reviews on Google and Facebook, and then display them on your site!

Regularly Post Blog Updates: Start a blog and regularly publish informative content related to countertops, home renovations, or interior design. This not only provides value to your visitors but also improves your website's search engine ranking. Share tips, trends, and project ideas to engage your audience. All content should be unique and don't copy and paste this content.

Project Pictures

We've talked about showcasing your work and that is super important for a shop. But let's dig more into project pictures and what you can do with them.

Social Media Showcase: Regularly post project photos on social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook. Use relevant hashtags to attract a broader audience and keep your followers engaged. Even use a small budget to promote these posts. They will get you TONS of exposure!

Google Maps Visibility: Ensure your business is listed on Google Maps and upload project photos regularly to it. This not only helps customers find you but also showcases your work's quality. And gives Google a signal to show your profile more.

Word-of-Mouth Power: When people share and like your project photos, it generates buzz and word-of-mouth referrals. Visuals are powerful tools for recommendations.

Do this consistently and you will gain more traction by getting more jobs. It's pretty easy to do once you get into the flow of getting pictures and posting them.

Increase Showroom Traffic

Something that we learned in 2023 is that the shops we work with close showroom traffic really well. In some cases 75+%! Social media ads can help drive more showroom traffic. Follow the tips below.

Local Targeting: Use Facebook and Instagram's advanced targeting options to focus your ads on users in your local area. You can narrow down your audience by zip code, city, or a radius around your showroom's location. By reaching potential customers who are nearby, you increase the likelihood of them visiting your showroom in person.

Showcase Showroom: Create ad campaigns that highlight your showroom's displays and features. Use visually appealing images or videos to give viewers a taste of what they can expect when they visit your shop. Mention any unique or trendy countertop designs that you have on display to pique their interest.

Promotions and Discounts: Price can be a powerful motivator. Consider running ad campaigns that feature special promotions or discounts for showroom visitors. Highlighting cost savings in your ads can attract more leads, as many customers are looking for value in their projects.

Call to Action (CTA): Make sure your ads include clear and compelling calls to action. Encourage viewers to "Visit Our Showroom Today," "Schedule a Consultation," or "Request a Free Quote." Using persuasive CTAs can drive potential customers to take action and engage with your shop directly.

In 2024, things might get a bit tougher for countertop shops, and I want to help you navigate the challenges. To really make it in this competitive landscape, you've got to focus on beefing up your online game. With more players entering the field, it's crucial to stand out online to snag those precious project leads. So, take a good look at your website; make sure it's up-to-date and user-friendly. Don't forget to showcase your work and engage with folks on social media – it helps build trust and a sense of community. And if you're not already using online ads and encouraging happy customers to leave reviews, it's high time to start. These steps will be your secret sauce for staying strong and getting noticed in 2024!

Stephen Alberts is the owner of the Countertop Marketing Co and STONE ENGAGE. They specialize in helping countertop companies grow the retail side of their business outside of word-of-mouth and referrals. They also offer software to help you engage more with customers and close more countertop projects. To learn more visit countertopmarketingco.com or stonengage.com. You can also email Stephen at steve@countertopmarketingco.com.

“... I would hope in the new year, we could start thinking about politics not like it was the Super Bowl, where you always have to have one team that wins and the other team has to be a loser.”

–John Breaux

TRAINING & EDUCATION

Are You Planning an Insane 2024?

Happy New Year! You may have heard of Einstein's definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. Are you planning an insane 2024 for your business, or are you going to make the fundamental changes needed to do things differently to get the different results you really want?

For many fabricators 2023 was a rough year. Business was soft and profits were down.

But what is true in general is not true for all. Some shops saw great success in 2023.

If your shop had a soft 2023, what are you going to change to make 2024 great again?

If your shop had a great 2023, are you leveraging that success to take full advantage of 2024?

Based on Einstein's definition, I am afraid I may be at least partially insane. I have been preaching and teaching Synchronous Flow for over 42 years now, and I have been writing in the *Slippery Rock Gazette* about Throughput Dollars (\$T) for over 18 months. For over 20 years, Ed Hill, the founder of Synchronous Solutions, has been preaching and teaching \$T as well, with his focus primarily on the countertop industry.

As a result of this relentless crusade to get this industry to understand \$T, Action Flow, Stone App, and the Stone Profit System have all integrated \$T into their software. Action Flow and Stone App have even worked with us to implement some more complex Synchronous Flow concepts into their systems. And yet I bet if we surveyed their user bases we would find only a small percentage are taking advantage of these features. And of those who are using \$T, virtually none take full advantage of what Synchronous Flow and \$T can mean for their businesses.

If you understand Synchronous Flow and the power of \$T, your business in 2024 will have:

1. One clear, unambiguous, #1 Objective (and it will be the same for ALL of you).

Rick Phelps

Synchronous Solutions



2. Three explicit S.M.A.R.T. Goals directly connected to that Objective.

3. Every department/function in your business will have their own clear, unambiguous #1 Objectives aligned to the business' #1 Objective.

4. Every department/function will have their own explicit S.M.A.R.T. Goals tied to their #1 Objective and thus directly linked to your business' #1 Objective.

5. Every manager in the business will have ONE current project (at a time) that is focused on moving the needle on one or more of their Goals.

The above is what truly understanding Synchronous Flow will mean for your business.

The elegance of Synchronous Flow is in its simplicity. Simplicity is also its bane.

This past summer I had a CEO of a \$300M dollar business push back on the idea of running his business based on \$T. He had an MBA from a prestigious school and had never heard of \$T... We later found out that the CEO and Board

Chairman "simply got 'cold feet' about the simplicity of the TOC approach" and chose not to engage with us!

Is that your problem, too? Is the difference between \$T and Gross Margin too subtle, too little, that you can't imagine it could possibly matter?

Are you afraid of being thought of as 'insane' for pursuing this craziness?

Here are three businesses you may have heard of running on the concepts of Synchronous Flow:

1. Chick-fil-a

Highest revenue and profitability per store of any fast-food chain, and not by just a little bit.

2. Southwest Airlines

Forty-seven consecutive years in a row of profitability in an industry that regularly sees airlines go bankrupt.

3. Amazon

Need I say anything more? *The Goal: A Process of Ongoing Improvement*, by Eliyahu Goldratt and Jeff Cox is one of three books every manager at Amazon must read.

There is no time like now. Take the risk of being thought insane! Clearly you will be in good company!

Besides, being thought insane is a whole lot more fun than proving you *are* insane by doing more of what you are already doing, yet expecting different results!

Make 2024 a year of massive progress and prosperity.

Make this the year to find out how to get your entire team pulling in the same direction, driving the continuous improvement of that which makes the biggest difference to your business and your life.

You will be glad you did!

Happy New Year, and see you at T.I.S.E.!

If you think having a skilled facilitator to walk your leadership team through this process will make it go a lot more smoothly and efficiently, contact Synchronous Solutions through our website www.synchronous-solutions.com/contact-us.

Alexander Makin Joins Alpha Professional Tools

Alpha Professional Tools® is pleased to announce the hire of Alexander Makin to represent as a regional sales manager in the South territory. Makin will service Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Southern Nevada, Texas and Utah.



With over 25 years of experience in the stone industry, Alexander Makin is a recognized leader and innovator in his field.

Makin began his journey as a stone fabricator in Louisiana, where he honed his skills in various stone shops. He then relocated to Colorado, where he took charge of a large stone shop with more than 120 employees, offering high-quality granite, marble, and quartz countertops to customers across the state. Alexander has mastered every aspect of the stone business, from sourcing and processing to designing and installing. His excellence and expertise earned him a nomination for Stone Fabricator of the Year in 2019.

Alexander is passionate about the stone, tile, and hardscape industries, and excited to work with our distributors and to assist them in servicing their customers.

If you have any questions or need additional information, he can be reached at (480) 848-6808, or E-mail: amakin@alpha-tools.com.

Alpha Professional Tools® was founded in 1986 and has become a leading manufacturer of quality tools for professionals in the natural/engineered stone, porcelain, ceramic, glass, construction, and hardscape industries. Alpha® provides the best products for cutting, drilling, shaping and polishing all types of materials. In addition to providing the best products in the industry, Alpha Professional Tools® offers a variety of services to support their products. More information is available at www.alpha-tools.com.

"It is always during a passing state of mind that we make lasting resolutions."

—Marcel Proust

Using Locally Sourced Limestone to Add Structure and Strength to Historic Building Projects

Julia Manglitz, AIA, LEED AP, APT RP, has worked on several building types throughout her career: county courthouses, state capitols and office buildings, university campus halls and community centers. What makes each of these public buildings unique is they're all landmarks in their communities. Another thing each of them has in common? Almost all feature locally or regionally-sourced natural stone.

Manglitz began her work in Kansas, where limestone is plentiful. As a result, most of the older heritage and iconic buildings showcase local limestone. The featured projects were completed during her tenure as an associate principal of historic preservation at [TreanorHL](#). She recently transitioned to senior architect with [Quinn Evans](#).

Stone is One of the Original Regional Materials

As an architect focused on historic preservation, Manglitz works with natural stone often. Stone has been used often throughout history for its durability and because it is fireproof. Manglitz notes that natural stone structures were also lower maintenance than wooden structures that required frequent repainting.

As westward expansion began and immigrants from Germany, Sweden, Italy, England, and Ireland settled in or passed through states like Kansas, many brought with them a history of stonework and masonry. An abundance of usable stone in relatively modest sizes available in quarries throughout the Midwest made it easy to source and use.

"There were various times of groups moving through. Some settled, some kept moving, but there were generally people around who understood what good material looks like, how to get it out of the ground, and how to get it shaped and put into buildings," Manglitz says.

The Case for Regional Natural Stone

Kansas is known for its limestone. Manglitz notes that one of the most well-known stones is Cottonwood limestone, a light gray-to-cream-colored fine-grained limestone. Cottonwood is the main facing material for many buildings on the University of Kansas and Kansas State



by Megy Karydes

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Photos Courtesy TreanorHL

Manglitz assessed sixty stone buildings on the Kansas State University campus in the summer of 2019. The buildings ranged in age from 20 to 143 years old; the study identified life-safety and water infiltration issues to help the University prioritize and plan façade repairs. Holton Hall (pictured here) was constructed in 1900 using Kansas Cottonwood and Junction City limestones. Photo credit TreanorHL.

The Kansas Statehouse exterior masonry restoration, completed in 2011, required over 7,000 dutchman repairs varying in size from a few pounds to several thousand. The façade features four types of limestone and seven granite, dating from the original construction to subsequent repairs. The project received a 2018 Tucker Design Award.

Photo credit Aaron Dougherty/TreanorHL.

University campuses as well as much of the Kansas State Capitol.

Another local stone is Silverdale, a creamy limestone with gold color tones often used in split face veneer stone applications and cut limestone applications due to its tight grain and lack of holes or pits.

"One of the more interesting stones that we run into a lot at Kansas State University is something called Neva, which is a slightly higher density limestone," Manglitz adds. "It's good for rough ashlar work and rock faced finishes."

Neva is often mixed with Cottonwood, which is softer and can take a tooled finish.

Historic Preservation and Natural Stone

While limestone is readily available throughout the Midwest, Manglitz notes sourcing can still be challenging for historic preservation projects, since blocks are not always actively quarried in the same size that were originally used on a building.

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Using Locally Sourced Limestone

Continued from page 10

“Trying to get material in the size that you would like to get it can be a pretty important part of sourcing the stone,” she explains. “When we’re working in preservation, that’s really dictated by the existing building. When we have to go out looking for substitute materials, or substitute stones, it does get really challenging.”

In some cases, Manglitz is trying to match the original color on a building. Other times, she’s looking for a stone that can work with a particular finish. “A lot of the buildings that I work on have some sort of tooled finish to them or they have carvings incorporated, and trying to make sure that you can accurately replicate and get the same feel for it is important,” she says.

Victory Eagle Connects with University of Kansas Campus

Manglitz works to recommend stone based on everything from price to aesthetics. She and her team were called upon to work on a 1929 “Victory Eagle” statue in honor of Douglas County residents who lost their lives fighting in World War I. The bronze Victory Eagle monument features a mother eagle with her wings spread wide, defending her eaglets in a nest.



The statue had seen better days after being stolen and thrown in a ditch before being rescued in the early 1980s. A new base needed to be designed before it could be relocated to Memorial Drive with other war memorials. The client initially wanted a base that wasn’t a native Kansas stone, but Manglitz recommended other stones that would be a more appropriate fit.

She began by recommending granite for the first two courses. “Granite is going to hold up a lot better; it’s not going to soak up de-icing salts that are likely to be used on the sidewalks and it will handle that installation much better than limestone,” she shared, adding that the dark green granite from Coldspring goes well with the overall landscape, since it sits on a site looking down into a forested valley.

The main shaft is Silverdale limestone from Kansas. “Silverdale has a little bit of a warmer color and it tends to go better with the existing architecture,” she says, again emphasizing the importance of regional stone used on other buildings throughout the area. “The more locally sourced stones historically used on the campus have a slightly warmer tone to them.”

Manglitz sees many benefits to choosing locally sourced stone over manmade materials like precast concrete in her work. She points to the lower embodied energy inherent in natural stone when compared to precast concrete as a major factor. “Precast you can do anywhere,” she says. “When you’re using a local stone product, you’re linking yourself to the history of construction within your particular region. It’s partly about place-making. It’s partly about the environment. And it’s partly thinking about durability for the next generation.”

Megy Karydes is a Chicago-based writer. Find her at MegyKarydes.com.

The 1929 bronze sculpture, Victory Eagle, moved to a new home along Memorial Drive at the University of Kansas in 2019. The stone pedestal follows the pattern historically recommended by the Victory Highway Association, which organized the memorials in 1921 to commemorate the loss of life in World War 1. Silverdale limestone, quarried in southern Kansas, and Mountain Green granite from Coldspring form the pedestal. Photo credit Julia Mathias Manglitz.



(Before and After) Fire gutted Kansas State University’s Nichols Hall in 1968. Adaptively reused in 1985, the 1911 building has continued to suffer accelerated deterioration of Neva and Cottonwood limestone due to the heat damage from the fire—a portion of the south façade before repair and stone replacement. Photo credit TreanorHL.



The stone façade of Nichols Hall as it appeared in 2017 after stone repair, replacement, repointing, and cleaning. Cottonwood limestone, supplied by Lardner Stone, was used when replacement was necessary. Photo credit Architectural Fotografics/TreanorHL.



Oklahoma State Building: From 2016 to 2020, Manglitz was the project manager for exterior masonry repairs to the 1917 Oklahoma State Capitol. The restoration included replacing veneer panels, dutchman repairs, crack pinning and injection, cleaning, and repointing. Tishomingo pink granite from Oklahoma clads the first floor, and Hoosier silver-gray from Indiana Quarries clads the upper floors. Photo credit F. Stop Photography/TreanorHL.

**“Study nature, love nature,
stay close to nature.
It will never fail you.”
—Frank Lloyd Wright**

Now is the Time

Last year at this time, I was encouraging you to look at your cyber security. Change passwords, use a VPN, change your PINS, and activate 2-step authentication for your safety. I am going to encourage you to do that this year as well, for the exact same 3 reasons:

- Data breaches this past year are on the rise.
- All the holiday shopping.
- It has probably been a while since you thought about your cyber security. (Like a year, maybe?)

However, in this new year I am going to encourage you to do something else as well... Take stock of your surroundings.

For a lot of businesses, not all but a lot, January and February are a bit slower work-wise. Winter weather, holiday spending and holiday energy burn-out tend to

Sharon Koehler Stone Industry Consultant



take its toll at the beginning of a year. This is the perfect time to look at your surroundings with a critical eye.

Showroom

- Check for outdated or damaged displays. Are you still showing a butterfly

Courtney Korselt Named Regional Business Director of Wall and Floor Products, Bostik, Inc.

Bostik, Inc., a world-class leader in specialty adhesives and flooring installation systems, has named Courtney Korselt as Regional Business Director, Wall & Floor Products. With a career spanning over 17 years at Bostik in various key management positions, most recently as Project Management Officer, Construction & Consumer Division, Korselt brings a wealth of adhesive market knowledge and B2B marketing expertise to her new role.



As Regional Business Director for Wall & Floor Products, Korselt is poised to make a significant impact on the company's growth and strategic vision. Her extensive experience and deep understanding of the adhesive market position her as the ideal leader to drive forward our wall and floor product division.

Korselt will bring a passion for the customer, additional focus on service, and the right solutions for Bostik and the customers to grow together. She stated, "I'm pleased to join a team with such breadth of experience in this industry. We are looking forward to a renewed focus on meeting

the needs of the market with new, innovative products that help the installer be more efficient while enjoying the great product quality you can always expect from Bostik."

The appointment of Courtney Korselt as Regional Business Director for Wall & Floor Products underscores Bostik's commitment to delivering outstanding products and service to its valued customers. Her leadership will undoubtedly contribute to the continued success and growth of the company. For more information visit www.bostik.com.

sink when you haven't seen one in years?

- Do your countertop displays need to be cleaned, repaired, and repolished?
- Are your quartz displays (or any displays) current and up to date?
- Is everything clean?
- Do you need to swap out that 10-year-old Uba Tuba for a new, modern natural stone or quartz color?
- Is everything labeled correctly or have the labels gotten dirty or peeled off?

Office

- Have you been meaning to get a new computer to replace that old, slow relic you have now?
- Do you have broken or unused equipment or furniture hanging around for no reason other than you haven't had time to get rid of it?
- Do you need to go through your files and organize or archive, or both?
- Do the walls need new, fresh drywall repair, and paint?
- Are all your vendor catalogs new and up to date?
- Do you need to upgrade your internet to something stronger and faster?

Shop

- Have you been putting off getting that new piece of equipment you want because you haven't had time to get it or to train on it?
- Has a team member been wanting to learn a new skill or machine but there hasn't been time?
- Is all your safety equipment up to date, labeled and in the right place? (When was the last time anyone stocked the first aid kit or checked the eye wash station?)
- Do your forklifts or other equipment need routine maintenance?
- Is your storage area easily accessible and neat so stored items can be found quickly and correctly?
- Do you need to make any changes to your shop layout for more efficient processing?

Material

- Are your slabs stored in a safe manner to help prevent accidents with a team member or customer? (Straps, bars, or other safety equipment?)
- Are your slabs labeled as to color, dimensions, etc.?
- Are the walking aisles clear and free of trash and debris?

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NTCA Honors Two Industry Leaders with Ring of Honor

The National Tile Contractors Association is proud to recognize the career accomplishments of Chris Walker of the David Allen Company (Contractor Member) and Eric Edelmayer of the Noble Company (Associate Member) for their support and service. The award presentation took place at Total Solutions Plus in New Orleans on Monday, October 23rd during a special awards lunch presentation.



Eric Edelmayer, Ring of Honor Recipient

"Eric Edelmayer has been a member of the NTCA Technical Committee for more than 35 years, and his unwavering support of the contracting community has been felt throughout that time," said NTCA Executive Director Bart Bettiga. "Eric has demonstrated an ability to help bridge communication between manufacturers and contractors and has played a leading role in finding consensus, leading to the development of new documents for the NTCA Reference Manual. He is most deserving of inclusion into our prestigious Ring of Honor."

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"One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors." –Plato

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Current Litigation

GoClips LLC vs [REDACTED]	Pending
GoClips LLC vs [REDACTED]	Pending
GoClips LLC vs [REDACTED]	Pending

Past Litigation and Disposition

GoClips LLC/Z Keepers LLC vs Cinclips LLC	Won at Jury Trial
GoClips LLC vs [REDACTED]	Settled
GoClips LLC vs [REDACTED]	Settled
GoClips LLC vs Ronald M Benton	Settled
GoClips LLC vs Web Granite Supplies Inc.	Settled
GoClips LLC vs Diamond Tec Enterprises LLC	Settled

OSHA Seeks to Add Union Reps to Inspections

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has proposed a rule that would allow employees to request that a non-governmental third party—which could be a representative from a labor union—to join an OSHA safety inspection of a non-union employer’s facility.

In a separate development, OSHA and the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) also announced that they have entered into a formal agreement to work together closely, coordinating their activities in a manner that promotes unionization of the workforce.

Commenting on the OSHA proposal to allow employees and agency inspectors to choose third parties, such as union representatives, to accompany the inspectors when they walk around employer facilities, Marc Freedman, vice president, employment policy for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said, “Without question, if OSHA moves forward with this regulation, the agency will be making clear its agenda is no longer focused on improving workplace safety but on promoting organized labor.”

In addition, he stressed that if the new rule is adopted as proposed, it would open the door to other parties with a grievance against the employer to be allowed in if an employee requested them. Think of environmental activists opposed to the use of fossil fuels seeking entry to a refinery, he suggested.

“I am not influenced by the expectation of promotion or pecuniary reward. I wish to be useful, and every kind of service necessary for the public good, become honorable by being necessary.”
—*Nathan Hale*

OSHA originally attempted to create this policy during the Obama administration, but it was later reversed when President Trump was in office. The Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act), OSHA’s enabling law, allows a representative of the employer and a representative authorized by employees to join OSHA officials during a workplace inspection.

Although the law states that the employee-authorized representative shall be an employee of the employer, it also says the agency’s safety inspector can allow a third-party representative “such as an industrial hygienist or a safety engineer” to accompany the inspection if they determine good cause is shown that this is reasonably necessary, note attorneys Melanie Paul, Jonathan Spitz and Lorien Schoenstedt of the Jackson Lewis law firm.

The new proposed rule would amend the OSH Act to clarify that, “for the purpose of the walkaround inspection, the representative authorized by employees may be an employee of the employer, or, when they are reasonably necessary to aid in the inspection, a third party.” OSHA says the clarification will “ensure employees are able to select trusted and knowledgeable representatives of their choice, leading to more effective inspections.”

If its rule-making proposal is adopted, OSHA explains that employees in workplaces without collective bargaining agreements will be able to designate a representative from “a worker advocacy group, community organization or labor union” to fulfill the role of being their representative in an OSHA inspection.”

The rule’s goal is to focus on the “knowledge, skills, or experience of the individual, rather than their professional discipline,” OSHA states. The proposed rule doesn’t cite union representatives as the only example of potential third-party representatives; others named by the agency include translators or representatives of local safety councils or worker advocacy organizations.

Under the rule, employers are still entitled to request that certain areas of the facility, particularly those containing trade secrets, be kept off-limits to designated employee representatives who do not work in that specific area of the workplace.

The proposed rule can be expected to generate sharp criticism from employers concerned with the extraordinarily broad range of third parties who might be allowed entry into their facilities during an OSHA inspection, point out the Jackson Lewis attorneys.

While the rule could provide an entry point for union representatives to organize workers, concerns also have been raised about the proposal leaving that kind of decision to the discretion of individual OSHA inspectors in the field.

When it is eventually adopted as a final rule—a process which could take a year or longer—it will apply only in those states where federal OSHA exercises direct jurisdiction over employers. In the 22 states that have their own state OSHA programs covering private employers, it will be up to them to decide whether they wish to adopt a similar rule. It seems likely that those states that are decidedly pro-union, like California, and Washington, will do just that.

OSHA and NLRB Link Up

In another development, OSHA and the NLRB reported entering into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that further signals their commitment to promoting unionization through blending enforcement of safety and labor laws. As both agencies put it when they announced it, the agreement will “strengthen the agencies’ partnership to promote safe and healthy workplaces through protecting worker voice.”

The NLRB already has signed off on a

series of MOUs with other federal agencies, including the Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Labor’s Wage and Hour Division and the Office of Labor-Management Standards as part of its ongoing interagency coordination initiative to promote a whole-of-government approach to enforcement of labor laws, targeting nonunion employers.

NLRB General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo and OSHA Chief Doug Parker suggested that this MOU is critical in bolstering protections needed for workers who choose to speak out about unsafe working conditions so they can do so without a fear of retaliation.

The MOU lays out protocols for the exchange of information between the agencies, as well as worker outreach, which includes OSHA providing potential victims of alleged unfair labor practices with the NLRB’s contact information. OSHA also will advise employees who file time-barred official complaints with the agency that they may still file an unfair labor charge with the NLRB for another six months.

Under the agreement, the NLRB will be sharing information with OSHA regarding workers who are currently or likely exposed to health or safety hazards, or to suspected violations of OSHA regulations, along with encouraging those workers to contact OSHA promptly. The MOU also includes provisions for protecting the confidentiality and information security of any data shared between the agencies.

[*Continued from page 16*](#)

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“My new year’s resolution? Set some unattainable career goals. Then some reasonable ones. Then something easy. Then settle into February. You?”

NTCA Honors Two Industry Leaders with Ring of Honor



Chris Walker, Ring of Honor Recipient

Continued from page 12

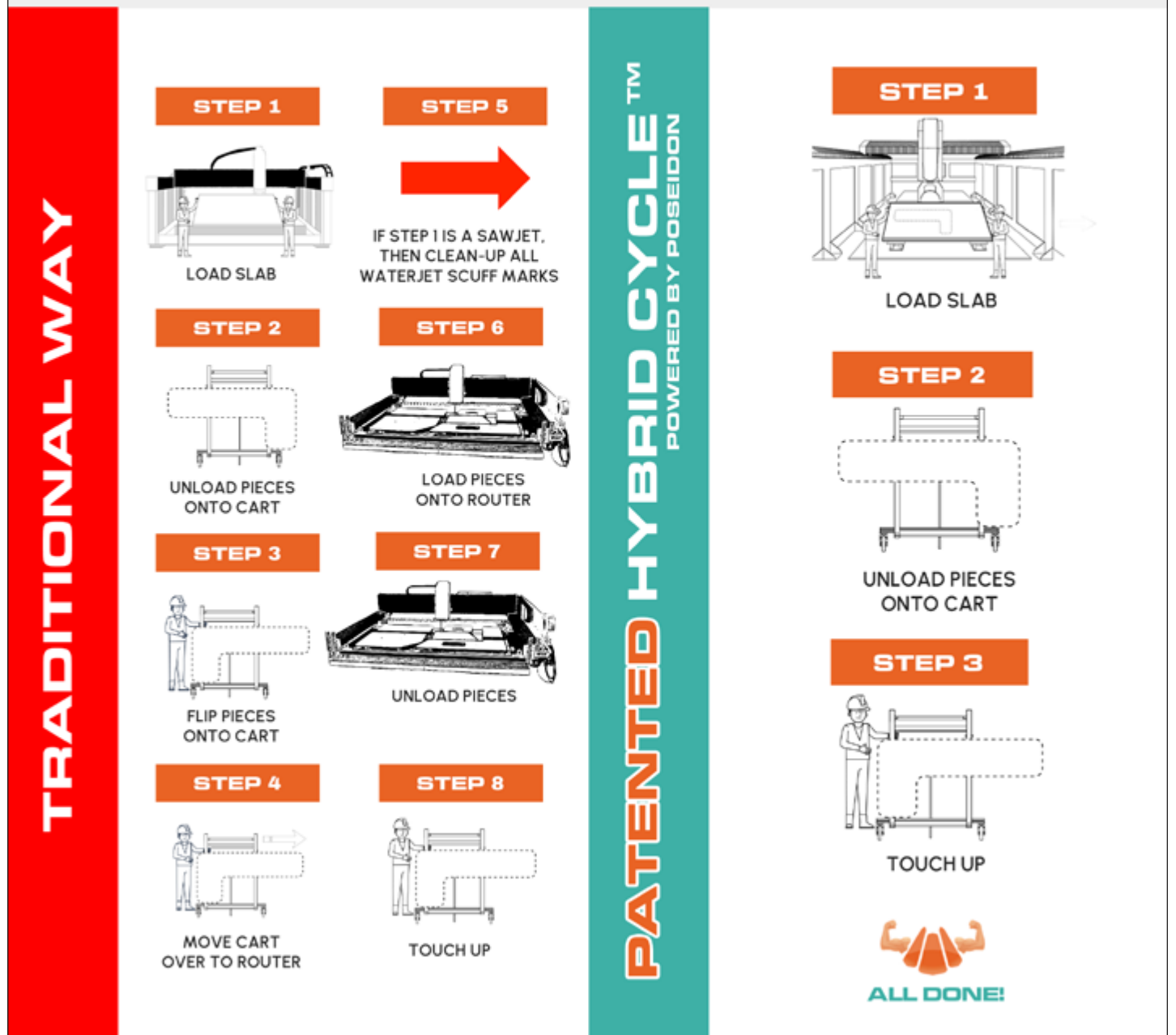
Chris Walker is being recognized by both the NTCA (Ring of Honor) and the Tile Contractors Association of America (Carl V. Cesery Award) for his role as a leading tile contractor in the development of installation standards and methods. Walker is the current chairman of the board of the American National Standards Specifications for Installation (ANSI A108), and a past president of the NTCA and current advisor to its Executive Committee. “Chris has played an integral role in spearheading revisions to the ANSI standards, creating consistency and clarity in important documents that benefits professionals who are specifying, selling or installing ceramic tile and natural stone”, said NTCA Chairman of the Board Martin Brookes. “His efforts in this area will leave a positive impact on the tile industry for years to come.”

The NTCA Ring of Honor was established in 2004 and recognizes individuals for their support of the National Tile Contractors strategic objectives. Total Solutions Plus was held October 2023 at the Hilton Riverfront Hotel in New Orleans, Louisiana.

For more information on the Ring of Honor and the NTCA visit the association website www.tile-assn.com/page/ntca-honors-awards.



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OSHA Seeks to Add Union Reps to Inspections

Continued from page 14

What should be of special interest to employers is that the MOU envisions opportunities for the NLRB and OSHA to conduct coordinated investigations and inspections “in appropriate cases and to the extent allowable under law.” In cases where there are overlapping statutory violations at issue, the agencies agree to “explore and confer” regarding what enforcement actions are appropriate for each agency to undertake.

The MOU also does not provide for or require notice to an employer or other providing party when the information is shared, point out attorneys for the Littler Mendelson law firm. “Employers should assume that information provided to one agency is provided to the other.”

The agreement also describes in detail how each agency will provide reciprocal training and education to appropriate personnel from the other agency. For example, the NLRB will train OSHA personnel on what constitutes protected concerted activity by employees and what is considered an unfair labor practice (ULP) under federal labor law.

In turn, OSHA will train NLRB personnel on OSHA standards, recordkeeping and reporting regulations, the general duty clause, and employee rights under the OSH Act. Under the MOU, the agencies will also engage in joint public engagement, outreach and education in person and on social media regarding the laws that each agency enforces.

Although state OSHA plan agencies are not directly impacted by the terms of the MOU, the agreement suggests that they are expected to respond to referrals from the NLRB concerning potential violations of state OSHA plan regulations and will be encouraged to participate in the training and information-sharing activities developed and agreed to by the agencies.

“Perfect freedom is as necessary to the health and vigor of commerce as it is to the health and vigor of citizenship.”

—Patrick Henry

ID by Undies

A pair of multicolored briefs peeking out above a robbery suspect's low-slung trousers helped police arrest him more than a year later, federal authorities in New York said in December.

The robbery happened at a tobacco shop in Queens on Sept. 14, 2022. Three masked men got out of a Mazda and entered the store, according to a complaint filed in federal court last week.

Two of the men pointed guns at employees and

customers while the third emptied the cash register and grabbed merchandise and employees' cellphones, the complaint said. The robbers fled in the Mazda.

Surveillance videos that were disseminated through the media showed the third robber wearing brightly colored briefs with a large letter R in white and the year 1990 in yellow.

An anonymous tipster passed along the Instagram handle of the suspect with the colorful underwear, the complaint said. The caller also told police that the robbers had tried to sell their stolen merchandise at another Queens location.

Detectives reviewed video footage from the sale

location and spotted the man with the colorful underwear, now easily identifiable because he was no longer wearing a mask, the complaint said.

Police identified the suspect based on his Instagram account, the video from the merchandise sale spot and photos from prior arrests, according to the complaint.

The 30-year-old suspect was arrested on a Wednesday morning at his home in Queens by members of a New York Police Department-Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms joint task force. He was awaiting arraignment in federal court in Brooklyn, a spokesperson for the U.S. Attorney's office said. The other two robbery suspects are still at large.

Stone Restoration and Maintenance Corner

Restoring the First Baptist Church of Knoxville, Tennessee

Happy New Year! I love being associated with the restoration of historical buildings. Bringing an old marble (in this particular case) installation back to its original, as-installed beauty, gives me great satisfaction. One of the oldest churches in Knoxville is First Baptist Church, Knoxville. It was established in 1843-1845. The current historic church building was built in 1923 and was the third and final building of the church assembly. The architect was Dougherty & Gardner and the church was built in the Neoclassical or Classical Revival design with an octagonal sanctuary. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2010.

So, 100 years later and with countless coats of everything from paste wax to acrylic, it is now time to restore all of the – and you guessed it – Pink Tennessee Marble. There are a couple varieties of the

Bob Murrell

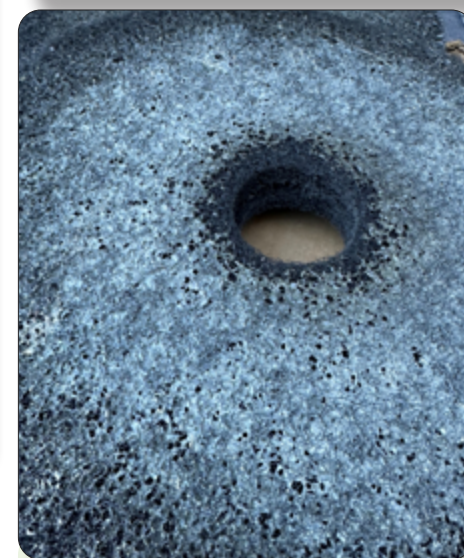
M3 Technologies

Photos by Bob Murrell



Pink Tennessee and some other stones too, such as Belgian Black Marble (which is actually a limestone). I suspect that these marbles were in fact quarried or imported locally at one of the quarries that eventually were all grouped under the one company, The Candoro Marble Company. These Tennessee pink marbles were

(Left: Belgian Black stringers on the staircases had been coated with an acrylic. (Below:) The coating was laboriously removed and Tenax Ager applied.



Top: The stripping process removed decades of coatings.

Above: Black floor pads blinded by the coatings removal process.

quarried, fabricated, shipped, and installed all across the country in government buildings, museums, hospitals, churches, and was even very popular with residential windowsills for many, many years. The Candoro Marble Company also became a very large importer of foreign marbles (like the Black Belgian Marble), and granites from all over the world.

The biggest issue with the marble floors, stairs, bases and other surfaces was that over the last 100 years, they had been coated with many applications of both paste wax and acrylic. I don't know if these maintenance chemicals had ever been stripped or removed previously, as the coatings were very thick. It was so thick that a fresh black pad might last a couple of hundred square feet (at best) before it was blinded on that side of the pad. Even the stringers of Belgian Black were coated in some sort of acrylic, like, old Mop & Glo, Super Shine-All, or similar. All of the marble surfaces were a streaked, scuffed, dingy, yellowed plastic-looking mess. Initially, there was no clue as to the actual condition of the marble surfaces beneath all those many layers of coatings.

The church agreed that the original intent of the marble floors and stairs was to be honed. After the coatings had been sufficiently removed and the stone could be evaluated, there was no evidence of any originally polished marble on the horizontal surfaces (floors or stairs). The only polished surfaces were the Belgian Black stair stringers and baseboards.

A restoration plan and procedure was eventually decided. Several heavy high-alkaline strippers were to be used: Majestic Ultra Strip and AcryliStrip. One worked better on the floor finish and the other worked better on the acrylics. This was a very tedious process. Note that it is preferable to use warm water with the strippers, to help increase efficacy.



The Neo-Classical First Baptist Church, Knoxville building is 100 years old this year.

[Please turn to page 22](#)

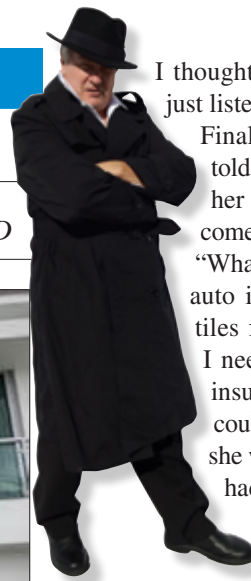
The Stone Detective

The Case of the Sky is Falling

Over the past 40 years, I thought I had seen everything. Today would prove me wrong.

I was sitting at my favorite greasy spoon, listening to the Admiral while reading the newspaper. Yes, folks, there is still a thing called a newspaper. There's something about reading the news on paper rather than getting it on my smartphone that appeals to me. Maybe this is dating me as belonging to an older generation, but it was always a tradition growing up. I was reading the opinion page, and this person was talking about the fairy tale Chicken Little. You know, the one where he keeps yelling that the sky is falling. This guy was digging into the current social relevance of this fairy tale when my phone rang. The voice on the other end was a lady, and she was crying and mumbling something like, "The tiles are falling!"

Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD



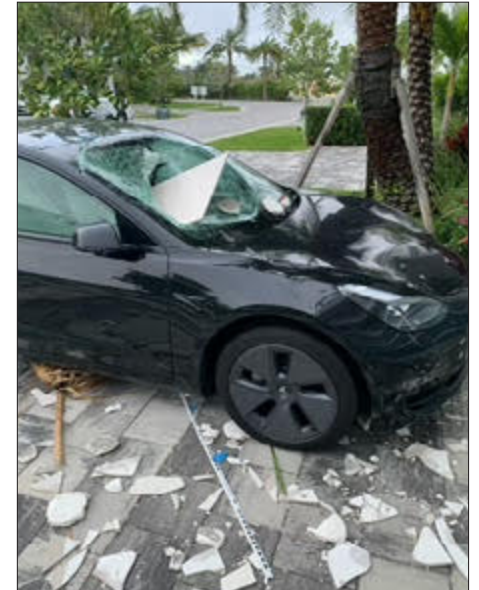
I thought I heard her wrong, but I just listened as she went on and on.

Finally, she calmed down and told me that she was waiting for her car insurance company to come by and assess the accident. "What?" I said. "What does your auto insurance have to do with tiles falling?" She told me that I needed to be there when the insurance adjuster arrived so I could explain. I thought maybe she was a little confused, or she

had been drinking or smoking something strong. I got the address and asked her when she needed me to

be there. She said 1 pm. She was only an hour away, so that was doable.

I arrived at her house and noticed several people standing around a car parked with several vans nearby. One belonged to an auto glass repair person, and the other was a tow truck. I was really confused at this point, but as I said before, I thought I had seen it all.



I got out of the old Woody and walked over to see what all the fuss was about. The minute I walked over there, I couldn't believe my eyes. There was a large stone panel sticking out of the windshield of the car, with broken pieces all over the ground.

[Please turn to page 23](#)

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I'm Starting to See a Crack In This Savings Scheme

Here's how my father once explained the concept of false economy: "It's the guy who takes extra-long strides to avoid wearing out his \$20 shoes and rips his \$50 pants."

I recently pulled a similar stunt. Neither pants nor shoes were harmed, but my eye-glasses sure took a beating.

Quick recap of my vision history: I've needed corrective vision since the fourth grade. Specs at first, then contact lenses, then a combination of both.

Sometime in my early 60s, bifocals entered the scene. This created a weird, on-off pattern. Wearing contacts, I had to put on close-up glasses to read. But if I was wearing far-off glasses, they had to be removed before I could read. Sorta like juggling bowling balls and thimbles at the same time.

Cataracts arrived in 2020. The surgery sounded dreadful.

"What?! You're gonna carve on my eyeballs? And I'll be awake the whole time? Aaak!"

Relax, said the doc. Piece of cake. It's done with lasers and over in minutes. You won't feel a thing, and you'll be amazed at the improvement.

Holy enlightenment! The results were outstanding!

Cataract patients have the option of getting "near" or "far" implant lenses. (Well, yes; one of each is available, but I nixed that idea immediately. If I want whacko vision, I'll drink heavily.)

I went the "far" route and now enjoy razor-sharp distant eyesight. Since surgery, the "worst" I've ever tested was 20/20. Once, I even locked in on 20/15.

Sam Venable
Department of Irony



The tradeoff, of course, comes in the closeup department.

Unless words are printed in boxcar letters, I can't make them out. Thus the need to invest deeply in cheap "drugstore readers." I keep 'em everywhere: bedroom, office, car, boat, you name it. Often, I wear a pair on a neck strap.

Just one problem: El-cheapo readers break easily — especially if they're dangling from your neck when you lift a heavy object and reflexively pull it to your chest.

Crack-snap!

Even purchased in bulk, the cost adds up. After numerous lifting accidents, I finally trained myself to swing the strap to my back, putting the el-cheapos out of harm's way.

A few days ago, Mary Ann and I were delivering groceries for our church's food pantry. At one stop, I proudly demonstrated the swing-around-to-my-back technique before hoisting a heavy bag. She was impressed.

She was less-than-impressed moments later when I flopped back into the car seat, forgetting to swing my glasses around to the front.

Crack-snap!

I yelled something about "sheets at the sunny beaches!" Mary Ann snickered. And I'll bet somewhere out there in the Great Beyond, Big Sam was laughing hard enough to split his \$50 britches.

Sam Venable is an author, comedic entertainer, and humor columnist for the *Knoxville (TN) News Sentinel*. His latest book is "The Joke's on YOU! (All I Did Was Clean Out My Files)." He may be reached at sam.venable@outlook.com.

"Hunting dogs are very smart.

They can learn to pursue any quarry. What we need to do is train hunting dogs to sniff out virtue, integrity, firm character, worthy principles, and good leadership. Then put the dogs on the campaign trail."

—P.J. O'Rourke

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Help Wanted - Naples, Florida Jim Lytell, Inc. is hiring for Marble and Stone Restoration Technicians. Will train, but experience preferred. Looking for a change? Call us today! Good driving record a must! Drug free company. \$18-\$30 . Contact: Jim Lytell, Phone: 239-948-3000. Email: office@jimlytellmarble.com.

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Stone Restoration Corner

Continued from page 17

These layers upon layers of coatings would melt and turn into a viscous, snotty-looking membrane. Using the machine, with one horseshoe weight (about 125 pounds total) and the black pad at the right moment, was essential. If you started too soon, the stripper wouldn't have adequate contact time and may not have loosened or melted the layer being attacked yet. If you waited too long, the membrane will simply settle back down and re-adhere to the surface again. It is best to get into an efficient rhythm when removing many years of heavy layers of multiple product coatings. It goes much easier when you are prepared and can make the necessary adjustments when needed.

It took several stripping applications to remove the coatings. The borders or edges required razor blades, as did the stairs (this was the most back-breaking part of the project). Basically, all of the detail 90° joints required both stripper and razor blades to successfully remove all of the plasticized coatings. Razor blades were also used on the stringers and baseboards, which had "slapwax" all over them. Slapwax is the result of slapping the mop or applicator against the baseboards when applying the coating to the floors. It is paramount to frequently change to a fresh, sharp razor blade to avoid scratching the marble. Pro tip: Buy razor blades in large quantity packs of at least 100. Doing the coatings removal right required a lot of detail hand work.

Disposal of your wastewater (stripper and coatings) is also an issue that must be dealt with. You can strain the wastewater with some sort of cheesecloth or similar material to help remove the solids (coatings) before disposal down the drains. Remember, this stuff was like a thick film the consistency of mucous. Check with the property owners to see where the best location for disposal is. In some cases, you may be required to haul any and all effluent away from the work site for disposal.



Slapwax on the Belgian Black baseboards. Right: Restoring the stairs involved some serious (and tedious) handwork.

Once the coatings were completely removed, a PLP 400 grit pad was used to basically exfoliate the marble surface. This helped to remove any residual coating, dirt, and light scratching. The floors looked pretty good at this point. However, after many years of seeing shine from the floor coatings, you know what the property owners said – they would like to see more shine, of course. So a 3,000 grit PLP was then used to create a nice patina (shine). This looked really nice and the owners were very happy with this look.

Tenax Ager was used on the darker pink marble borders, baseboards, and stringers. The field of lighter pink was impregnated with AkemI Color Intensifier to help enhance color and give protection.

The project turned out very nice and the church was very pleased with the results. Maintenance going forward will be much easier and the surfaces should look great for many years to come. Basically, dust mopping and damp mopping with either Majestic No-Rinse Neutral Cleaner or Majestic Stone Soap will be all that is required. Maybe every few years the floors might need freshening up with a 12,000 grit PLP pad and that's it.

Please turn to page 23



Tennessee Pink Marble stairs after coating removal. Tenax Ager was applied to the Dark Pink Tennessee marble to restore the deep, rich contrast.

“The rights of neutrality will only be respected when they are defended by an adequate power. A nation, despicable by its weakness, forfeits even the privilege of being neutral.” —Alexander Hamilton

Stone Restoration Corner

Continued from page 22

It is most always easier, more cost-effective, and with better appearance, to maintain stone naturally than it is to maintain a coating.

As always and before beginning any new project, I recommend submitting a test area to confirm the results and the procedure, prior to starting a stone or hard surface restoration/maintenance project. Also, the best way to help ensure success is by partnering with a good distributor, like BB Industries, that knows the business. They can help with technical support, product purchase decisions, logistics, and other pertinent project information.

Bob Murrell has worked in the natural stone industry for over 40 years and is well known for his expertise in natural stone, tile, and decorative concrete restoration and maintenance. He helped develop some of the main products and processes which revolutionized the industry, and is currently the Director of Operations for M3 Technologies.

Send your comments and questions to Bob at attn: publisher@slipperyrockgazette.net.



The Stone Detective

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Now I understood why she wanted me there.

I looked up at the side of the building, and sure enough, there were empty spaces where the panel had fallen. It was obvious why it had failed, so I told her and the insurance adjuster the following. The slabs were installed using what the industry calls the 'dab method.' In other words, they place little dabs of mortar on the substrate and then place the stone. The problem with this method is that it is not a recognized or code-approved method and can lead to all kinds of problems. First and foremost, panels of this nature on the outside of a building should be mechanically anchored and not just adhered with setting mortar. Later, I would also discover that the wrong setting mortar was used. "I bet this was a low bidder job," I thought.

I told her I would write up a report, but she needed to contact her homeowner's insurance as well and possibly an attorney. Another case solved, and now every time I hear the Chicken Little tale, I will think of this situation. Luckily, no one got hurt.

The Stone Detective is a fictional character created by Dr. Frederick M. Hueston, PhD, written to entertain and educate. Dr. Fred has written over 33 books on stone and tile installations, fabrication and restoration and also serves as an expert for many legal cases across the world. Send your comments to fhueston@stoneforensics.com.

Now is the Time

Continued from page 12

- Is your non-UV resistant material stored away from direct sunlight?
- Are your remnant pieces stored neatly or just put wherever there is a spot?
- Do you have any faded material, or material that is in all actuality too small to really do anything with that can be disposed of?

Vehicles:

- Are they up to date on routine maintenance like oil changes and inspections?
- Do they need any special maintenance? (Have you been putting off fixing that cracked windshield, fixing that minor coolant leak, or repairing the heat and A/C?)
- Do all their lights and electronics work properly?
- Are they relatively clean and neat on the inside? (Yes, I know they are work vehicles but sometimes they get too trashy and that reflects negatively on your business.)



- Are the wraps and signage on your vehicles that advertise your business clean with up-to-date information and readable?
- Are the outsides of your vehicles in decent shape with no large dents, peeling paint, or scrapes?

People:

- Is everyone on the same page? Does the receptionist say what the installer says and is that what the salesperson would say as well?

- Is everyone familiar with the company procedures and processing steps?
- Do all employees understand company policies? (And perks, for that matter.)
- If company uniforms or clothing is provided, is it still in good condition and does it fit well? (With the understanding that some team members may get VERY dirty.)
- Do all employees know who the HR person is in case they need HR for whatever reason?
- Do all employees understand the chain of command?

All businesses have ebbs and flows. If it's not January/February, it may be some other time. No matter when it happens, use it as a chance to take stock of what is going on around you. Slow time does not have to be useless time. Slow time can be productive time, maybe just in a different way.

Please send your thoughts and comments on this article to Sharon Koehler at Sharonk.SRG@gmail.com.

"Elections should be held on April 16th- the day after we pay our income taxes. That is one of the few things that might discourage politicians from being big spenders."

—Thomas Sowell

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