

# Cathedral

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## Cathedral Stoneworks

### *The Industrious Evolution*

Retta Blaney

*And the glorious majesty of the Lord our God be upon us:*

*prosper thou the work of our hands upon us:*

*O prosper thou our handy-work.*

PSALM 90:17

Back in 1979, Dean James Parks Morton hired five young people from the surrounding community as apprentices to assist two British stonemasons in the recently begun new work on the Gothic towers. Little more than a decade later, that idea has blossomed into Cathedral Stoneworks, a company that employs more than 40 trainees from the neighborhood and 25 master craftspeople from around the world. The firm, under the leadership of preservation developer David Teitelbaum, aims to become the leading finisher and restorer of fine architectural stone in North America. Through this rapid growth, however, it maintains its dual aim: to finish building the Cathedral and to help build lives.

"This is genuine job training," the Dean insists. "We have consciously gone to the surrounding neighborhoods of Harlem and the Bronx where the unemployment rate is the highest in the city. You don't need a lot of book education to be a good stone cutter, but you have to have a great deal of attention to detail, physical stamina and a commitment to seeing something through. We're building people, through the pride of doing something difficult and worthwhile."

As the Cathedral prepares to enter its second century, the focus of Cathedral Stoneworks is

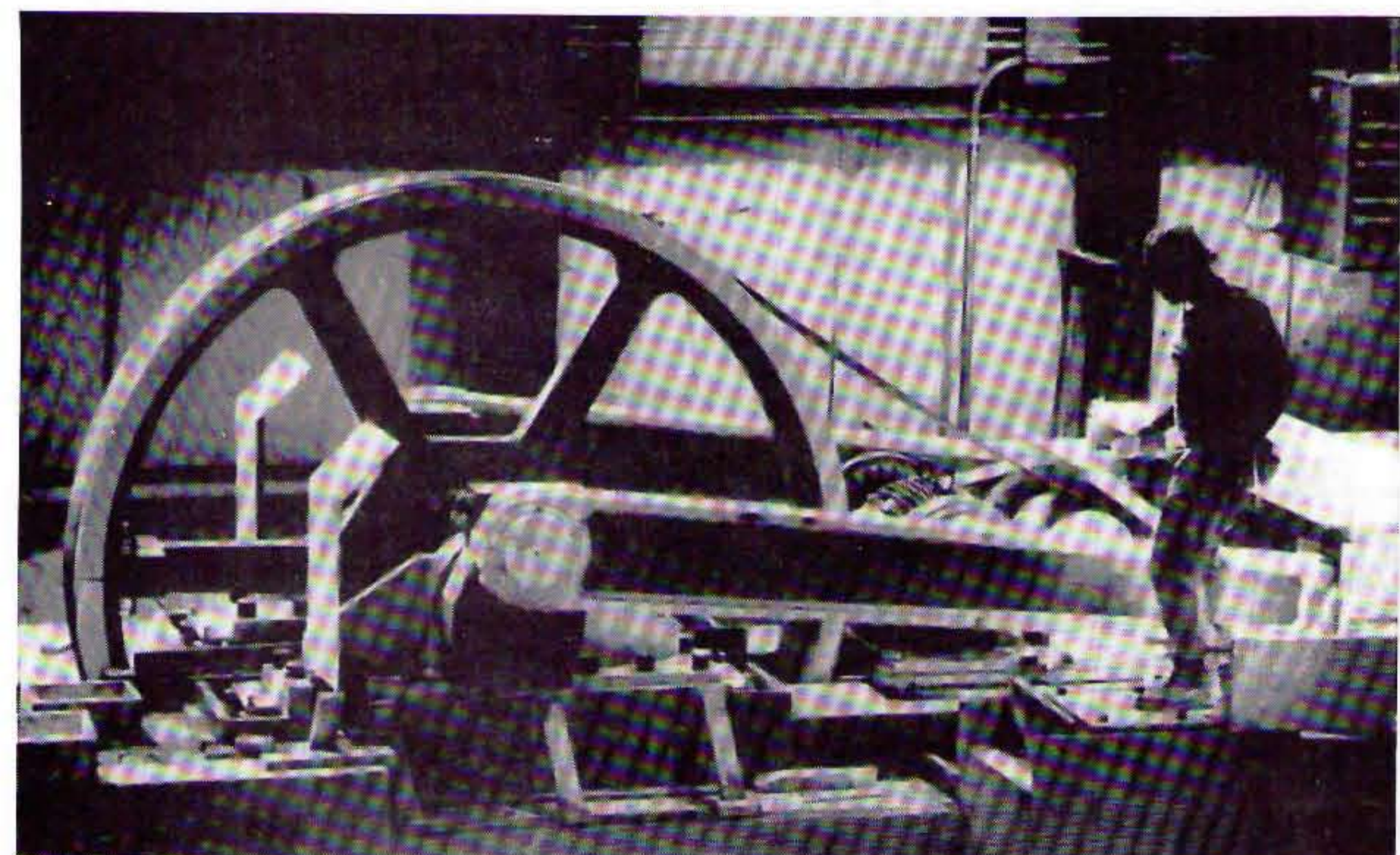
expanding to include not only building the great church, but helping to rebuild cities across the nation by restoring their landmark buildings.

In December, Cathedral Stoneworks signed a joint-venture partnership agreement with Brisk Waterproofing Company, the northeastern division of St. Louis-based Western Waterproofing Company, expanding its potential client base from the metropolitan area to the nation. Brisk is the largest masonry contractor in the U.S. With over 25,000 jobs under its belt and annual revenues of \$100 million, Brisk has the reach, and the proven ability to manage large-scale restorations. Cathedral Stoneworks contributes the skilled craftspeople and the machinery to accomplish even the most demanding detail work.

Cathedral Stoneworks is now the only full-service stone fabrication and restoration source in the country capable of handling all types of stone. It is also the first in the world to apply robust CAD/CAM technology to stone cutting and restoration. For the first time, an architect's plans can be translated into precise computer code that directly controls the saws, routers and other shaping tools. It could mean a revolution in stone, making this durable material as workable as plaster or wood. "The possibilities," says master



TOP: Governor Mario Cuomo lends a hand at the celebration announcing a \$3.7 million loan guarantee for Cathedral Stoneworks from the state's Job Development Authority. OVER: A worker installs the 7-foot-diameter flywheel for Cathedral Stoneworks' new 70-blade gang saw.



sculptor Simon Verity, "are immense. You could create a whole new bank of ornament."

Already, the partnership between Brisk and Cathedral Stoneworks has shown promise. In a three-month trial collaboration last fall, the team landed all three projects it sought. It completed the first of many bas-relief panel restorations at Rockefeller Center; won a General Services Administration award to restore monumental sculpture at the U.S. Customs House at Bowling Green; and won a contract from the Metropolitan Transit Authority to restore the statue of Mercury atop New York's Grand Central Station.

"We're mainstream now," Teitelbaum says. "We're focusing our energy on filling a void that's existed for many years." One third of the earnings from Cathedral Stoneworks projects goes directly to the Cathedral, to fund the ongoing building and training programs. And just as important, the firm attracts money to finance the hiring of more trainees. Recently, the New York State Job Development Authority provided a \$3.7 million loan guarantee to support the purchase of new plant and equipment. Governor Mario Cuomo visited the stoneyard to celebrate the award. Six-figure grants from the Kaplan Fund and from the city's Urban Development Corporation directly support the Stoneyard Institute's training efforts. Teitelbaum hopes to hire a minimum of 20 to 30 new trainees over the next two years.

Some in the Cathedral congregation have complained that all these outside jobs are taking

away from the work of completing the church. But it takes money to complete a cathedral—more than a hundred million dollars at last estimate—and Dean Morton is quick to point out that without these new ventures, we would have to lay off workers when money becomes tight.

"In the 80s we had to lay people off because the Cathedral was the only thing we were building," he says. "The dream is that we'll have so much money we will be able to take on many, many more workers. Then, work on the Cathedral can proceed more quickly."

Though traditional in its attitude towards craft, the training that workers are getting is the most up-to-date available. Medieval masons could never have imagined a machine that cuts 70 slabs of marble at a time or another that polishes a 15-foot marble slab in four minutes. But these machines are in the stoneyard, along with a circular saw ten feet in diameter and laser cameras that can scan damaged stonework, feed the images into a computer, and recreate the original design with micro-millimeter accuracy. Stoneyard workers proudly call it the high-tech Stone Age.

Cathedral Stoneworks is moving in the right direction: building lives and cities, restoring pride and architecture, and so giving meaning to the Gothic towers that it lifts towards the sky. ■

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