

Coastal Steel: Match Made in Faith

By Leigh-Ann Brannigan, Membership Manager

Goethals Bridge – Caisson Cage

More than two decades ago, a project manager in her mid-30s with young children and an Ironworker superintendent with three decades of experience took a leap of faith and went into business together, taking the name “Coastal Steel Construction” from an esteemed owner who was closing shop. The two, Marcie Shavel and Gerald Mahaffey, have turned Coastal Steel Construction of NJ, LLC into one of the leading subcontractors in the installation of reinforcing steel for the heavy/highway sector in the state, a showcase for their now 85 combined years of expertise. They mark 21 years in business this year.

“Our focus on performance, productivity, quality and safety is represented in every Coastal Steel project.”

As a single trade employer, they note with pride the mega projects they’ve been a part of – the Bayonne Bridge NJ Main Span Roadway and Approach (1,500 tons of rebar), the recently finished George Washington Bridge PIP Helix Replacement, the NJ Holland Tunnel Piers, the Paulsboro Marine Terminal Wharf Construction (1,700 tons in Phase 1 and 3,500 tons in Phase 2), the American Dream Water Park (3,750 tons) and Journal Squared 2 in Jersey City, a 72-story high-rise where they fast-tracked a deck every two days (6,500 tons).

Coastal Steel fabricated all of the reinforcing steel for the new Tappan Zee Bridge – 10,000 tons, in Perth Amboy. The partners call out the Goethals Bridge NJ Main Span and Approach (5,600 tons) project as one of their most challenging, with a zero-tolerance policy for less-than-excellent work and demanding conditions “that brought incredible rewards,” says Marcie.

When speaking of and sharing stories about the projects they have worked on and completed, Marcie and Jerry are very enthusiastic, proud, and yet humble. Even more so, they are graciously complimentary of the GCs they work for and have worked with.

Success “On the Backs of Skilled Craftworkers”

Coming from the public arena – Marcie worked for Slattery Skanska and Jerry for Coastal Steel Construction, Inc. of Pennsylvania, the original Coastal Steel – they landed certifications to bid work from public agencies in New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware, including the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. With Marcie as principal and majority owner, Coastal Steel is also certified as a DBE, SBE and WBE.

“We don’t like to focus on being a WBE,” commented Marcie. “We know contractors view us as a quality subcontractor for our experience and industry leadership. The WBE/SBE/DBE certifications are incidental to our added value on any project.”

Their partnership is clearly the foundation of their business. Jerry reminisces that every job he worked on when Marcie was project manager at Skanska went smoothly and efficiently. “It didn’t come any better than a

Marcie job,” he smiles. “It was such a privilege to have her confidence in me when we started the business.”

They carry that partnership aspect over to every project management team they contract with, says Marcie. “That’s the key to a successful project and our continued success,” she adds. “We look at plans together, bounce ideas back and forth...contractors respect our opinions, intelligence and experience.”

Along with the partnership comes their reliance on the skill and dedication of their Ironworker workforce. “All our projects are built on the backs of our skilled craftworkers,” Marcie affirms solemnly. “We have cultivated one of the best Ironworker organizations in the region. Our focus on performance, productivity, quality and safety is represented in every Coastal Steel project.”

Weathering the Pandemic

In 2019, Coastal Steel employed 70 Ironworkers. When the pandemic hit, the company was forced to significantly reduce its workforce.

“The pandemic caused a tremendous decline in our annual revenue for 2020 and the start of 2021,” Marcie relates. “Fortunately, a lot of work was considered essential, and we’re looking for work to pick up this summer. In fact, we’re already seeing an uptick in activity.”



*Paulsboro Marine Terminal Wharf (5,200 tons rebar)
Phase I – Weeks Marine
Phase II – Commerce Construction*



Goethals Bridge NJ Main Span & Approach (5,600 tons rebar)

Recollecting the work Coastal Steel performed at the Paulsboro Marine Terminal, Marcie and Jerry look forward to the offshore wind industry bringing more opportunities to the southern region of New Jersey.

They note the “wonderful” demand for infrastructure will continue, and “welcome any and all infrastructure spending.”

Technology...and a 0.7mm Pentel...are Powerful Tools

Marcie can get enthusiastic about technology – “Smart phones providing instant communication, live pictures and videos are invaluable!” she declares. “Sharing information in real-time is so effective and a powerful tool for on-the-spot problem-solving.”

BUT (and one can sense the “but” before she continues), although she agrees electronic plans accelerate the exchange process of bid documents, contract plans and shop drawings, for Marcie “nothing can replace printed plans, highlighters, quad paper and my 0.7mm Pentel pencil.”

While Marcie agrees technology is needed... “things change and we have to adapt,” she also adds it cannot replace the work or performance of a dedicated, hardworking craftworker.

Attracting Young People into Ironworking

She and Jerry share stories about ironworking in the past, a backbreaking task. While tie guns that ease tasks and technology that aids efficiency help draw younger people into the construction workforce, Marcie and Jerry are quick to assure they have no trouble attracting workers. The company has even relocated workers and their families to New Jersey because the workers expressed interest in Coastal Steel and the union.

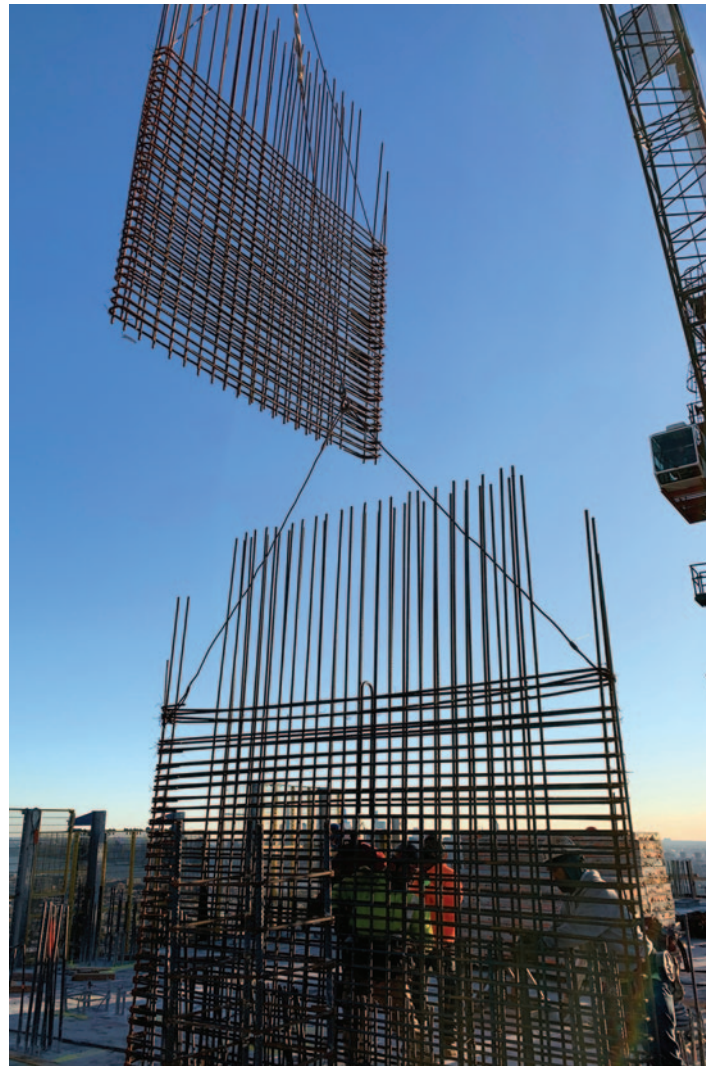
“It’s a good living with excellent benefits,” says Jerry firmly.

“In addition to Labor Relations, ACCNJ provides necessary communication points for our local industry. And we know you have our back. It’s a great resource for us.”

“I encourage anyone with a passion to build to pursue a career in construction,” adds Marcie. “I can’t think of a more rewarding career. Very few industries afford such a long-lasting, tangible representation of your hard work. I can’t take a drive without sparking a memory of a project I’ve been associated with.”



*Newark Airport Terminal A Redevelopment
Bridges N61, N62 & N63 (1,520 tons)
Future AirTrain Foundation*



Journal Squared 2, Jersey City (6,500 tons rebar)

Association Value: “You Have Our Back”

When the company was formed in 2000, Coastal Steel Construction of NJ, LLC joined AGC of New Jersey, and stayed with the Association following the merger in 2013.

“We rely on ACCNJ to negotiate union agreements on our behalf,” explains Marcie. “In addition to Labor Relations, ACCNJ provides necessary communication points for our local industry. And we know you have our back. It’s a great resource for us.”

For the Future...

Marcie and Jerry agree it’s hard to predict anything these days, but look forward to better times post-pandemic. As opportunities come up, they concur “you really need to know what projects will work for you.”

They have no doubt their partnership will endure.

Photos courtesy of Coastal Steel Construction of NJ, LLC.