

# Raising the Roof Gives Buildings New Stature

By Carolyn Colwell

STAFF WRITER

**A** BEWILDERED commuter apparently couldn't believe his eyes when he drove by the Nikon warehouse along the Long Island Expressway in Melville one winter afternoon three years ago.

It looked as if part of the roof on the 45,000-square-foot building he passed every day had blown off. He exited and drove to the building to express his concern.

What the man was surprised by wasn't the effect of a hurricane or an explosion. Instead, since that morning, about one-third of the roof had quietly been raised at a rate of about one foot an hour.

And once a sheath of steel paneling had been wrapped around the elevated roof and supporting steel structure to form new walls, a formerly obsolete space had been turned into a functional new warehouse for the Nikon Corp.

This process, which has been repeated about a half-dozen times on Long Island, appears destined to have a dramatic impact on the industrial real estate market.

"It's sort of a second lease on life for a lot of real estate on Long Island," said David Pennetta, a principal at the commercial brokerage Oxford & Simpson.

As the demand for industrial space turns from manufacturing to warehouses and distribution centers, many of the light industrial buildings that sprang up across the Island in the 1950s and '60s are outdated because of their low, 12- to 14-foot ceilings.

The market is now demanding what's known as the "high cube structure," with clearances of 20 feet to 35 feet that leave room for multiple pallet stacks and high-tech "picking" systems in which computers direct forklifts.

Pennetta, for example, said he is looking for 100,000 square feet of

warehouse space in Nassau County for a client and "the building does not exist that doesn't have a tenant in it already."

The patented technology, E-Z Riser by Melville-based Space Technology Inc., offers one solution to this problem by allowing landlords to transform their antiquated properties by more than doubling the ceiling height.

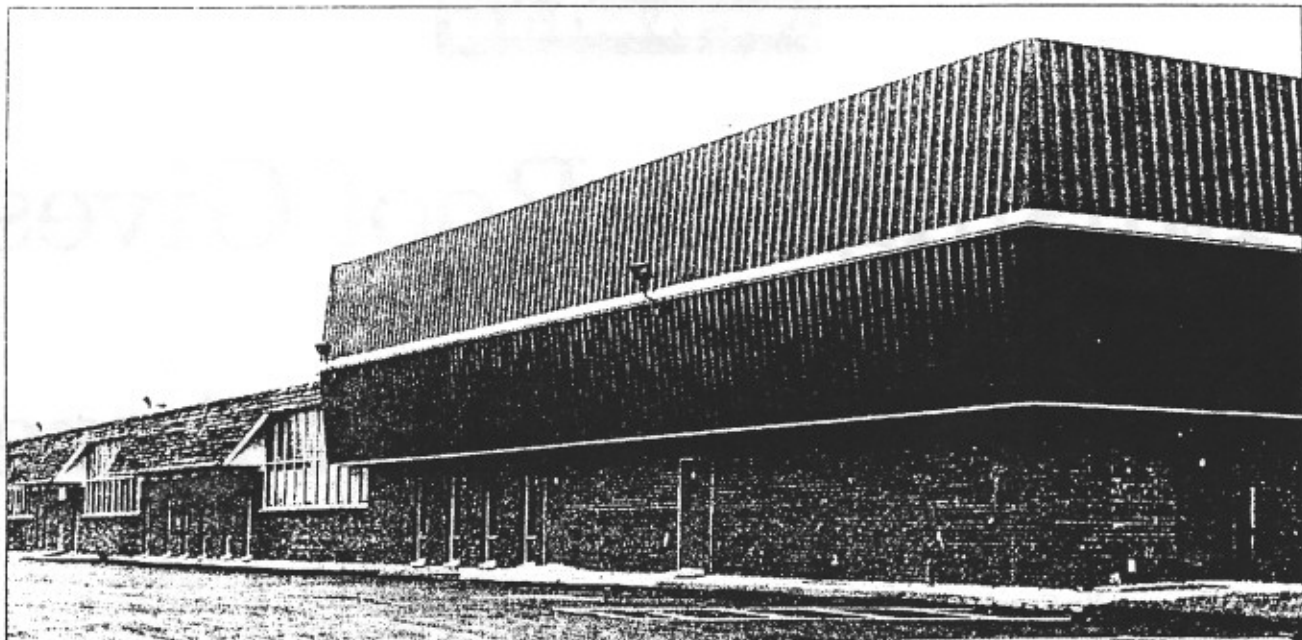
The way it works is amazingly simple. Steel sleeves are wrapped around the support beams for the roof and collared to hydraulic pumps. Then the roof is separated from the walls. And the pumps quietly lift the roof "like an umbrella," said Space Technology's Jeff Allen.

The process allows the wiring, plumbing and other utilities to be elevated along with the roof, and often the same sprinkling, lighting and heating systems can be used, Allen said.

The biggest lift that has been done was on a 368,000-square-foot building in Bridgewater, N.J., where the height was raised from 14 feet to 25 feet of ceiling clearance, said Allen's partner, Stuart Goldring.

The process has solved problems for a number of Long Island landlords and tenants. Lennard Axinn, who owns the building leased by Nikon, had once planned to tear down the building and put up a three-story glass and granite office building. But when the office market fell off in the late '80s, that dream died. At the same time, "Construction costs and rental rates started going up . . . It crossed a boundary where it started to make financial sense" to revive the building by raising part of the roof, Axinn said. He's now thinking of doing the same thing to a 90,000-square-foot building in Plainview.

Similarly, a 100,000-square-foot building at 540 Broad Hollow Rd. in Melville with 16-foot clearances was on the market for about two years before a buyer was found, according to broker Bill Greiner of Greiner & Maltz Co. Rubie's Costume Co. bought the building when it realized



Newsday / Dick Yarwood

**At the Nikon Corp. warehouse in Melville, steel was wrapped around the elevated roof to form new walls.**

it could raise the warehouse roof to 29 feet.

The building at 90 Orville Dr. in Bohemia was one-third vacant for four or five years before Nature's Bounty, the vitamin manufacturer, bought it, according to Corporate National Realty's broker Doug Omstrom. He said brokers had "problems selling the building because of the low ceiling. We had Space Technology come in and look at the building so when someone like Nature's Bounty came along, we knew what we could do."

The clothing distributor Ben Elias Industries was running out of space in Inwood, but moving was too radical a change, according to owner Allan Elias. It lifted the roofs on two buildings and quadrupled its warehouse space at a fraction of the cost of new construction, Elias said.

At Spiegel Associates in Jericho, brokers are using the E-Z Riser op-

tion, which seems to have no competitors, to market older buildings, said president Art Sanders. But Pennetta said he sometimes runs into resistance when he explains to a client what could be done to increase the space.

"I don't always get a good response," Pennetta said. "People think something's wrong with the building." But Pennetta describes it as an approach that's "very, very cost effective."

He said that by raising a ceiling clearance, an owner or tenant can literally double the storage space and, in effect, cut the rent in half per square foot. With the cost on most lifts running at about \$10 to \$12 per square foot, this option compares favorably with new construction. Elias calculated that putting up a new building would cost him at least \$50 per square foot plus the cost of operating temporarily at another site.

Another advantage was that his taxes didn't increase appreciably on the lifted building, Elias added, since they are mainly based on the area of the building, not the volume.

Bob Silverman, a warehousing consultant at Gross & Associates in Woodbridge, N.J., said that roof raising hasn't become a widespread trend because it's suitable only for urban areas where high land costs make it more inexpensive than new construction. He cautioned that some downsides of the Space Technology approach might be the increased load on a floor or the need to improve sprinkler systems or lighting.

Allen has an answer to those objections. He said the load on the floor doesn't increase because the roof hasn't changed. In most instances the same sprinkler system may be used or easily upgraded, he added. LILCO rebates on updated lighting fixtures often offset their cost, he said.



(631) 491-8500  
FAX (631) 491-8503  
(800) 784-3150

**Space Technology, Inc.**  
INDUSTRIAL ROOF LIFTING  
[www.Rooflift.com](http://www.Rooflift.com)

Jeffrey R. Allen

21 Beaumont Drive  
Melville, New York 11747