

Real Estate Journal

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Roof lifting is giving new life to old buildings

MELVILLE, NY There is an over-abundance of low-ceiling buildings, built long ago, in locations that are now highly desirable. Yet their limited clearance renders them inappropriate for today's users, who typically require more cubic capacity. Increasingly, we have seen a startling innovation that for many years has been quietly transforming older, low-clearance structures into taller, more valuable facilities. The procedure actually lifts the entire existing roof, intact, to 2 or 3 times its original height.

The details of the process are simple to understand, yet seem sophisticated in their implementation. First, each vertical column in the structure is cut and enclosed by a steel "sleeve." Next, special hydraulic jacks lift all the columns up through their sleeves simultaneously, at the rate of one foot per hour. This causes the entire roof to rise, along with lights, sprinklers, heating, and other rooftop equipment undisturbed. The newly created height is then enclosed with an upper wall section.

The company that provides this unique service, Space Technology Inc. (STI) of Melville, has lifted the roof of buildings from 10,000 to over 1 million s/f. Their history shows that demand for this procedure is generated by a variety of sources:

Real Estate Brokers - It is often difficult to provide prospective buyers or tenants with sites that meet their exact capacity requirements. Whether to accommodate increased storage, taller equipment, or a second level, lifting the roof has proven to be an invaluable tool. Creative-thinking brokers have started to list their previously "obsolete" properties as "height expandable." They claim that this notation has enabled them to attract a much wider market of buyers and lessees.

Builders/Developers/REIT's - Like brokers, developers also find some vacancies hard to fill. When elevated to new heights, low structures increase value and demand. When Reckson Associates engaged STI to lift the roof of a vacant 154,000 s/f warehouse, the project was featured in the New York Times. The speculative renovation brought immediate full tenancy. A larger



Before picture of a roof with a 16 ft. clearance



After picture of building after being lifted to a 29 ft. clearance

project for ABC Properties likewise enabled the owners to encourage occupancy. Others that have called upon STI to attract tenants include First Industrial Realty Trust, Binswanger-Klatskin, and Spiegel Associates.

Developers/Investors - Roof-lifting has spurred savvy real estate buyers to actively pursue previously overlooked opportunities. They target low-clearance structures, priced appealingly to reflect the obsolete height. Once the roof is lifted, the properties become vastly improved assets. The vacant 368,000 s/f Mack Truck facility was purchased at only 13' clear. Once lifted to over 24' it yielded significant profit, attracting Colgate Palmolive, and later Hewlett Packard.

Building Owners and Landlords - Roof-lifting has even been performed in occupied warehouses. Work is completed without disturbing ongoing operations. Weather protected, secure enclosure is provided throughout the project. Landlords gain by retaining existing tenants that have outgrown their current facility. Users benefit by avoiding a costly and disruptive relocation. Companies that have utilized this concept include Elias Industries, Amscan Inc., and Reliable Van & Storage (Allied Van Lines).

Warehouse Users - Whether as tenants or owners, companies are using roof-lifting to convert available low-ceiling sites into productive new distribution centers. Tenants who have gained the space they needed in for-

merly unacceptable structures include Nikon, Restaurant Depot, Paramount Liquor Distributors, and Firestone Rubber. Buyers who have seized opportunities to buy, lift, and transform undesirable buildings into efficient storage sites, include Nature's Bounty Vitamins, Fresh Direct Foods, Jacló Inc. (Durst Industries), Gemstar, and Sclafani Foods.

Retailers - National retailers often require consistent heights throughout their locations. Desirable sites often fall short of their specification. Demolishing and rebuilding a taller roof structure is time-consuming and cost-prohibitive. STI's "E-Z Riser" method has been embraced by retailers including Best Buy, Linens N Things, Office Max, and BJ's Wholesale Club.

General Contractors - When bidding on renovation work, general contractors have found that they gain a significant competitive advantage, when they utilize the time and cost-savings inherent in roof-lifting.

Material Handling Equipment Dealers - Today's high-reaching lift equipment makes full use of the height gained by roof-lifting. The once-accepted standard of 24' clearance has been overtaken by demand for 32'-40' heights, spurred by advances in handling equipment technology.

Others - There have been countless other applications of roof-lifting. Creative thinkers have applied it to schools, truck-repair shops, gymnasiums, religious facilities, transfer stations, health care facilities, self storage depots, etc.

The ingenious concept of roof-lifting avoids the costly construction of square footage, which increases taxes, requires additional land, expands parking requirements, involves messy excavation and significantly longer completion time.

According to the informative website www.Rooflift.com, roof-lifting projects include structural engineering, steel fabrication, delivery, installation, lift, and enclosure.

The process of roof-lifting has been "on the rise" since first developed in 1972, and promises to expand even further as more new space is required in old buildings.