

As Seen In

Long Island
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Increased overhead

Space Technology taking LI companies to new heights



Jeffrey R. Allen: Serious about raising the roof.

By DAWN WOTAPKA HARDESTY

Allan Elias measures success by the pallet. The more boxes stacked up by his Ben Elias Industries Corp., a reseller of clothing to big discount chains, the more profit potential.

So when the family-owned business outgrew its 14-foot ceilings in Inwood, Elias sought solutions. Eventually, he looked up. With help from a firm called Space Technology Inc., the company

increased its ceiling height by 22 feet – a 350 percent increase in capacity that made room for 3,600 pallets, up from 800, and “literally millions of garments,” says Elias, the firm’s executive vice president.

All in a day’s work, says Jeffrey R. Allen, a partner in Melville-based Space Technology who boasts his company is the only firm nationwide that can lift the roof a foot an hour and keep the structure intact. With the lights on. And employees working.

In two decades, dozens of companies

have tapped Space Technology’s patented hydraulic system, including such Long Island stalwarts as Restaurant Depot, Rubie’s Costume Co. and vitamin giant Nature’s Bounty. It has upped the ante for retail shells, not-for-profit organizations and even lent its services to Great Neck High School’s gym.

“That was oddball,” admits a grinning Allen.

Most customers, though, are industrial users who, like Elias, are looking for an affordable alternative to buying or leasing

Overhead: Making the old and small new and tall

additional space or adding on.

Thanks to its manufacturing roots, the Northeast is brimming with outdated industrial structures with low ceilings. Nowhere is that more true than on Long Island, where the exit of the big defense manufacturers left the region scrambling to find another economic base. Over the years, the economy diversified and rebounded, but the real estate never caught up.

“Long Island is loaded with functionally obsolete buildings,” notes Jeff Schwartzberg, a senior director with Sutton & Edwards Inc./TCN Worldwide.

An accidental discovery

Space Technology’s E-Z Riser roof-lifting system was invented back in 1972, when Frank Donnelley, a New Jersey crane dealer, was trying to sell a bridge crane to a company whose building was eight feet too short. Donnelley patented his system of telescoping lifters, but he never thought of it as much more than a great way to sell a crane.

Allen, then a management consultant, came upon the essentially dormant

system in 1986 when he was helping a client plot ways to grow. Convinced it had the potential to revolutionize the industrial market, Allen partnered with Stuart Goldring, the owner of a Farmingdale warehouse equipment company, and secured the exclusive rights to market the service.

Allen declined to discuss costs, but real estate experts put the price at between \$10 and \$16 per square foot, depending on the size of the building’s footprint and how high you plan to go. The Elias job, which included heating equipment, specialty fork lifts and rack storage systems, came in at around \$1 million.

In the last two decades, Allen has logged hundreds of thousands of miles driving and flying nationwide to meet potential customers. He’ll talk to anyone, and preliminary estimates are free.

Brokers often request estimates to help pitch potential buyers. Some purchasers, brokers report, pay rock-bottom prices for useless buildings and lift the roof. They can flip the building with a hefty return or charge more rent.

So how exactly does Allen, ahem, raise the roof?

The process starts by encasing existing columns in boxes of thick steel stretching from floor to ceiling. Around the site’s perimeter, telescopic lifting columns are installed adjacent to the walls. Just before the lift, the roof is separated from the walls and the lifting equipment caps each column. Then the patented process begins. The ceiling goes up.

Prepping the site can take weeks and the lift itself is so slow it often disappoints observers, Allen concedes. Often the only way to tell the roof is actually rising is by the sunlight streaming through the gap left behind – though that is quickly blocked out by “skin,” the new upper wall, that can rise with the roof.

Allen compares it to an umbrella opening, but Paul Merandi of Grand Machinery Exchange in Hauppauge may have a better analogy.

“It was just amazing to watch,” says Merandi, whose firm recently rose in stature from 18 to 35 feet. “It’s like being under a table and having someone raise the four legs up over your head.”

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