Three seasons of the year, when production demand at O&G’s asphalt and concrete plants is high and the quarries and wash plants are making aggregate flat out, there is no time for anything but emergency repairs. Essential, unavoidable maintenance tasks need to be sandwiched into the winter window, the one slow season the facilities experience.

Tony Damiano is Vice President of the Materials Division. He began as a mechanic in 1962 (which happens to make him the longest serving employee on the rolls today). He became a master mechanic and, in 1971, was brought over to learn the operations of the company’s plants. With two asphalt plants, three concrete plants and one quarry, maintenance was simpler then. It was a perfect way for him to ease into the role and prepare for the steady acquisition and construction of plants and quarries that would mark the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s. Today Damiano is responsible for the smooth operations of twenty plants and quarries.

You could say that the winter of 2014 was aggressive. It was snowy and bitter and blustery and it just hung on. In the depths of it, when most outdoor operations were slowed to a “seasonally adjusted” pace, the crews who maintain the company’s plants were working outdoors at peak speed in their only real window of opportunity.
Assistant Vice President Brad Oneglia oversees asphalt operations. “We do maintenance every day through the season but winter, for the asphalt and crushing plants, is a critical time to assess, plan the work and go beyond maintenance to improvements.”

In very large part because of the winter maintenance programs, the plants are able to operate at peak capacity in season. “Our uptime is pretty darn good,” Damiano asserts. “We have an excellent reliability record.” He knows because he’s seen it time and again: plants rarely go down. If one does go down thru some fluke – a lightning strike, a blown bearing – it will not be down for long. “We will do whatever it takes to get back on line,” he says. In such cases Damiano consults with management about workload and the force needed to apply: is it a rush and the crew works as late as needed to to be ready for tomorrow, or is the demand a little lighter and the crew works normal hours to remedy the situation. Either is fine for Damiano. Whatever it takes.

The thirty or so men who work at winter upkeep are a lot like him: innately mechanical, multi-skilled, willing to learn on the fly, unwilling to shrink before challenges and able to work long and hard when the job demands it.

For Damiano and his superintendents – Barry Squinobal, son Joey Damiano, Brian McEvoy, Dave Guerrera and Dan Walker – experience guides the various plans of attack at the facilities. (Squinobal’s position is different from the other superintendents’. He is a “superintendent at large.” He travels plant to plant as needs arise, often multiple locations
on any given day, and can operate a crane and just about any piece of equipment. He’s been with Damiano on every plant build since the 1977. He’s essential to keeping the work flow going. Years have been spent accruing information, like how much tonnage can reliably process through a particular plant before X, Y and Z parts need attention. It’s a maintenance calculus running in their heads. “You almost just know,” is how Damiano puts it. Little takes these men by surprise.

Winter maintenance season unofficially begins in mid-December and runs to mid-March. In addition to maintenance it’s the time when some major modifications can be made. For instance, last winter at the South Leonard Street asphalt plant in Waterbury a RAP (recycled asphalt product) system was added to process asphalt millings coming off roads.

In Southbury a new crushing system was added to the asphalt plant in Southbury.

At asphalt plants, maintenance is mostly replacing wear parts based on tonnage through then the past seasons. Screens that properly size raw materials, the chains that move the elevators carrying product, drum liners, tips, bearings, conveyor belts, V belts – these are the culprits needing attention. It is much the same at the quarries where blast rock is crushed and processed into a range of aggregate sizes. Most of the rock is basalt and not extremely abrasive so the wear factor, Damiano says, is in his favor. But north of Torrington, over at the Burrville plant where the rock is granite and indurated (hard as, well, rock), the wear parts take more of a beating and demand more attention. Naturally occurring sand is especially hard on steel components. These are all factors at play in the winter maintenance equation.

Concrete plants are a different issue. They remain in operation year-round as customers’ needs for concrete never stop. This winter, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, a repair crew in Stamford focused for five weeks on repairing worn-out aggregate bins. They worked at night, accommodating daytime demand. The press of a tight schedule was a constant. The coordination was intensive and it all got done.

“Winter work goes with the territory,” says Joey Damiano, who oversees multiple plants and quarries for the company. “When I started here my boss, Buddy Svetz, told me, ‘This is no place for sissies,” he laughs. While winter work isn’t for the faint of heart, he says, the rest of the year provides the consolation of not being “stuck inside.” This was a winter that tried everyone’s patience, he reflects as he wipes down and stows his tools in his pickup at the end of a day when the high temperature barely cracked 20 degrees. It was as tough a winter as he’s endured in 30-plus years working outdoors year round. His crew persevered alongside him, battling the work and the elements in equal parts or as he puts it, “spending half the time trying not to freeze a finger off.”

Winters can be even nastier for crews at O&G’s southern-most plants in Bridgeport and Stamford where the winds hit in a straight shot off Long Island Sound. Brian McEvoy, another veteran with 30-plus years under his belt, leads repairs to those plants: “This winter was extremely hard. What are you gonna do? We survived it,” he reflects on an April day when the temperatures were finally reaching into the 50s. Just as it is for the other superintendents and their teams, the camaraderie of McEvoy’s tight-knit crews is foremost in his mind. “My guys did very well, they really put their noses to the grindstone and worked. They know when we can get inside to warm up a little and they know when we’ve got to just stay outside and get the job done.” Facing summer with some resignation (“It’s nicer but asphalt plants get extremely hot!”) he shrugs and says, “Let’s just hope next winter won’t be as bad.”

Dave Guerrera oversees plant operations in Southbury, the company’s largest quarry as well as a significant producer of asphalt. He and his crew faced a trifecta of adversity. First it was the weather plain and simple that made even simple operations a challenge. Too many times snow and ice shrouded the processing plants and had to be chipped and shoveled away before any progress could be made. Then there was the five to six man crew that, because of a few key retirements last year, would normally have been at seven or eight. Lastly, the plants were operating later into 2013 than usual, making more product for customers (good). But winter arrived harder and faster than usual (bad) and Guerrera and his crew weren’t able to clean out before waste material froze and then dried rock-hard to screens, bins and chutes. In a more normal winter he

“These guys work under adverse conditions – it’s very impressive and commendable.
What they do is tough, it’s hard and it’s critical. There’s a lot of heavy work ... it gets done and it gets done right.”

TJ ONEGLIA
plans about two weeks of time to clean out and disassemble plenty of parts from his long list to bring indoors out of the elements, making a stockpile of items that can await attention until bitterly cold days when crews can move inside to work. “We were waiting for a thaw this year so we could do that but it never happened. Some major heavy work had to be performed out in the open,” he says.

Like McEvoy and Damiano, Guerrera knows what has to happen to avoid down time when spring arrives. “I’m under the gun for routine and preventive maintenance. But my guys, they were unbelievable. They may whine a little when you tell them about what they have to do that day but that’s the last you’ll hear of it. They get right out into the cold and work hard and do what they have to do. And I don’t care how bundled up you are, when it’s ten degrees out and with the wind, that wind kills you. After eight hours out there you’re dog tired.”

TJ Oneglia, Assistant Vice President, is almost reverential in his praise for the winter maintenance crews. “These guys work under adverse conditions – it’s very impressive and commendable. What they do is tough, it’s hard and it’s critical. There’s a lot of heavy work, cutting, welding, patching, changing belts. It gets done and it gets done right.”

Working safely in winter becomes more of an issue relative to the rest of the year. The tendency is to get hurt more because the maintenance crews, who typically operate loaders or run the plants from control rooms, are exposed to more places and more tasks where injuries can happen.

Oneglia has up-close management oversight of the quarries and concrete plants. “I’m always impressed with guys who can work outside in the winter and do it safely. Environmental factors elevate the level of risk. What’s an easy task on a warm, sunny day takes on a whole other level of risk when it’s windy and there’s a wintry mix falling. Considering the repairs they make and the conditions they work in, their safety record is awesome. In Woodbury since 2004 they’ve worked 148,300 hours with-
out a lost-time accident and since ‘04 at the Bogue Road wash plant it’s been 157,771 work hours. These guys know how to properly plan repair work which includes a thorough hazard analysis as well as a risk management process for each job they perform. Their record shows they can optimize safety and productivity at the same time. Nothing could make me prouder of the team we have than that."

“The challenges are great, from working safely to our productivity, even from a standpoint of being flexible,” says Brad Oneglia. “You may plan to do something for the next day but overnight ten inches of snow falls and you need to be able to adjust on the fly.”

He continues: “These crews are the heart and soul of our plants in many ways. If our asphalt, concrete and aggregate plants aren’t in peak operating condition there’s a cost to pay down the line. Having a consistent supply of quality materials is essential to the success of the company and the building and civil projects we undertake.”

Winter maintenance costs could not be less like the fickle, unpredictable winter weather. Years of maintenance work have been recorded in admirable detail and computerized to make a cost baseline. “The Main Office can pull records,” says Damiano, “that when you average it out over 10, 15, 20 years you really have a good handle on maintenance costs. Year-to-year it’s pretty much the same.”

“I’d just like to add,” says Tony Damiano, “that O&G is blessed with some of the best employees I think a company could ever want. They are all very conscientious about what they do, and they’re all very good at what they do.”

Across the company this winter, from Waterbury to New Milford to Stamford, Damiano’s maintenance crews shined. Outdoors in the harshest, longest winter in 30 years, crews safely performed hard, physical labor to make sure that when the first hints of warm spring weather awakened construction in the state O&G would be fully prepared to deliver.
We’re all familiar with the essential ingredients that comprise a successful organization: hard work, productivity, attention to detail and the like. While they’re all important for sustaining a company, they take a back seat to the vital ingredient that separates the survivors from the extinct. I’m talking about good ideas. Good ideas are the magic potion that enables an organization to thrive.

Organizations are organic by nature. You can think of them as oak trees. Rich soil, sunlight, moisture and optimal temperature by themselves won’t grow an oak tree. But add the seed into that environment and a tree takes root. In the corporate world, good ideas are seeds. As a healthy oak tree grows and produces more acorns which become the seeds for it to continue thriving and proliferating, people with good ideas propel a corporation.

To that end, I could paper our corporate office walls with photos of present and past employees whose good ideas made O&G the organization that it is today.

I’ve seen good ideas conceived and incubated in every division and department within the company. Where do they come from? They come from creative people at all levels who genuinely like what they do. These people integrate seemingly unconnected experiences and their interconnections nurture great ideas.

Genuine insights are hard to come by. In reality, most great ideas come into the world half-baked, more hunch than revelation. They have the seed of something profound but they lack a key element. I believe that missing element is other people with ideas ready for interaction. It is the job of management to provide a liquid environment – the fertile soil – where those partial ideas can connect. Such an environment makes it easier to spread good ideas, but more importantly to complete and implement them.

While I could fill chapters in the O&G History Book of Ideas with concrete examples of great thinking, here’s one that merits honorable mention. Twenty-plus years ago, a young staff of wanna-be bridge builders wound our way into a joint venture to bid the new Baldwin Bridge at the mouth of the Connecticut River. Knowing next to nothing about building the precast segmental bridge called for in the bid solicitation, I located the name of a reference book on the subject. I asked a young engineer, Mark Carroll, to find it and order a copy to help us with our bid. (Mark is a guy who knows how to use a telephone. I’d wager the cache of phone numbers and contacts in his head would make the NSA blush.) He reported back an hour later having ordered the book and, to my surprise, having called the author and arranged for him to come school us on the costs and sequencing of segmental bridge building. We won the job, the rest is history.

In its ninety-year history, O&G has completed hundreds of projects and expanded in directions involving disciplines that would make most companies pause. All these accomplishments, along with the many awards for job site safety, environmental compliance, financing and the like, are the outward manifestations of what is really at work – a fearless group of creative individuals who uncovered and focused on the opportunities in front of them.

For this we salute you and want you to know that you are the source of our pride. You have the boldness to look beyond the walls around you. You have the tenacity to open the door and explore the possibilities. Your efforts lead to our collective expertise in new methodologies, areas and directions that otherwise would not have been tried. Indeed, serendipity is what occurred the day you chose to come to work at O&G.
The left brain, science says, is mathematical, calculating and strategic. The right brain generates the creative urge, frees the spirit, urges us to laugh and paint the blank canvas. One side or the other, the analytic or the creative, dominates its complement. But Lee Sullivan’s wiring isn’t split that way. Both sides of her brain flourish pretty much equally.

Working for years in construction engineering offices where she has been responsible for estimating and managing the piles of details associated with large building projects has honed Sullivan’s organizational skills. She is stupendously organized, compelled to have every detail fastidiously reckoned, accounted for and on schedule.

She also writes children’s books, presenting the adult world of construction and machines in colorful, educational books for young readers (or the read-to) with published titles like Trains on the Move and Roads Take Us Home.

“I guess I’m a left brain-right brain renaissance person,” says Sullivan, a preconstruction manager in the Building Division since last September. “People think you have to be either good at math or good at reading and writing but not both. I don’t believe that anyone should be good at only one or the other. When I went to college my roommate was an engineer and I would help her with her homework. I thought it was fun so I switched into the engineering program from liberal arts. But because I was interested in architecture I also wanted to take the sort of ‘softer’ classes. I took poetry and studio art plus all the civil engineering and structural engineering classes. And soil mechanics and the design of dams – I really loved that.”

In the summers she mastered surveying, working near her home in Boston and later at Ford Motor Company’s sprawling Rouge plant in Dearborn, Michigan. She was freshly graduated from Lafayette College when she was scooped up by Turner Construction and immersed in surveying for the concrete work the company was self-performing in Washington, D.C. Her supervisor spotted her uniqueness. “Since I was good at visualizing because of my art background,” she says, “the chief estimator saw that I was going to be good at helping him. On rainy days when I was stuck in the office he gave me drawings so I could do takeoff and estimating for him.”

Sullivan soon moved full-time into estimating, working there for four years until she became a mom. When she took several years off to raise her son, her writing gift anchored her to the working world. “You can only dig in a sandbox so long. I couldn’t go from working full-time to being at home full-time. So I started writing at home.”

When her husband at the time, also employed by Turner, was relocated to the Northwest Corner to oversee a project in Canaan, the young family transplanted itself. Turner fed her part-time estimating work that she could squeeze in between raising her family, which had now grown to two sons. And she wrote.

The left-brain, organized and driven side of Sullivan wouldn’t simply write, though. She purposed to make her writing count and envisioned a series that would translate her own love of construction into books for young and very young kids. She sent her first manuscript, Bridges Connect, to a number of publishers, knowing it would land in their “slush piles” but hoping it would eventually be picked up and read and she’d get a call. It was and she did. A Minneapolis publisher of school and library books for children recognized the beauty of Sullivan’s vision for a book series. They would come to call it Building Block Books. She was signed for four books on four topics: bridges, roads, towers and dams. The series would grow to include twelve titles.

“They’d come up with the ideas and ask me to write the books. They kept giving me more books to write. Their editor-in-chief would say, ‘You’re the boy-book person.’ We got along really well.”

Over the next dozen years Sullivan would pen 23 books for the same publisher. Her last effort, The Flyer Flew: How the Wright Brothers Invented the Airplane, was published in 2006. Three of her creations were resurrected and re-titled in 2010 for the same publisher’s Lightning Bolt Books series. Another book, Get Around in the City, was picked up by
National Geographic for re-publication in an oversized format in 2011. Sullivan traveled and researched and collaborated, meeting engineers and road builders and tunnel diggers and motorcycle racers (“so cool” she says). She learned a lot about the publishing business and was quick to draw parallels between it and her daily work.

“My preconstruction work at O&G and my book writing are more similar than you might imagine. There’s a lot of cooperative work involved in creating the plan and the format for a book, and the editors and the publishing company finish the product – the building, if you will. And like construction, if you have a client who likes your performance they rehire you.”

As a preconstruction manager Sullivan is responsible to a client for its building project as soon as O&G is hired, from the schematic design stage to when the first shovel hits the ground. Managing schedules so permitting and reviews are done on time, collaborating with architects to get the drawings prepared on time, working with estimators to ensure the costs meet budget, writing the scopes and buying the sub-contracts – it’s all part of what she does daily. Presently she’s Preconstruction Manager for the Putnam High School project (see “On the Move” on page 23). She’s picking up the O&G methodology from Ken Biega and, principally, from Lorel Purcell. “She’s brilliant. She really knows and I’m learning. I spent many years in estimating at Gilbane and Turner but they don’t do it the same way. Lorel’s so perfect to work with because we’re both hyper-organized and that’s the whole point – keeping it all managed.” That’s the left brain talking.

Percolating over in the right side of Sullivan’s brain is a book for adult readers which will explore her position that traveling by motorcycle is a metaphor for life. “It will be a practical book, not a ‘Zen’ kind of book.” She commutes on a motorcycle between Torrington and her Salisbury home almost every day, spring until nearly winter, alternating between the Ducati, the Triumph (heated grips and laptop stowage space make it her favorite for the trip), the Moto Guzzi and the spiffy, Crayola-orange Vespa scooter. Bikes are a passion she picked up while writing her kid’s book, Motorcycles. ▲

Looking Back...

- Look closely at this Mack “Bulldog” truck from the 1920s and you can make out “Oneglia and Gervasini” hand painted on the hood. The man behind the wheel is Henry Grohs who has to have been one of the company’s earliest employees. The “Bulldog,” officially the Mack Model AC, was chain driven, had solid rubber treads and was a popular industry workhorse in its day, credited with giving the Mack Motor Truck Company its bulldog identity. (Photos contributed by Jonathan Grohs of Torrington, son of Henry Grohs.)

- In a previous incarnation, before O&G acquired and transformed it into a Masonry Division showroom and mason supply yard, the buildings and yard at 550 South Leonard Street were a coal yard. The property of the Massimo Fuel Company, located in Waterbury’s industrial south end, once held hills of black coal. The coal shown here was soft coal stockpiled for use in supplying heat and hot water in City of Waterbury municipal buildings.
My Days at O&G: Rhonda Cote

“My Days at O&G” profiles employees around the company working at unusual jobs every day

You could compare what Rhonda Cote does to “intelligent filtering.” Stationed behind the curving front desk at the Main Office lobby, overseeing the comings and goings of employees and guests, tracking live-feed cameras from around the company, continually plugged into the telephone switchboard, Rhonda Cote filters: permitting the regular, redirecting the off-course, setting straight the erroneous and rejecting the downright devious.

Rhonda began with O&G in 1993 in the mail room. A year or so afterward she began training to be “the 7 A.M. girl” under “Bert” Zander. With Bert’s retirement in 1996 Rhonda moved to the front desk full time. On a typical workday the 7 A.M. girl is among the first in (before 7 A.M. actually), unlocking doors, switching on equipment and setting the workplace stage for the day.

Though she never thought she’d be doing so well now while she was growing up, she clearly landed on her calling. She’s custom made for her position. “I like people and I like helping,” she says. She’s the first and often only point of contact with O&G that many people have. No matter the tempest that may be brewing, Rhonda sails with an even keel – professional, helpful, friendly.

The position at switchboard has demanded that she multitask, before the term “multitasking” ever joined the business lexicon. In the last half-decade or so it has become her norm. Perhaps it’s accentuated because Rhonda is willing to take on new assignments. Some are short term, others blossom into responsibility which is directing telephone traffic. All the tasks she completes are not printed on any job description.

Chief among her morning rituals is checking every security camera (twenty locations and close to 90 cameras), verifying they are all working, and troubleshooting any issues with Nick Silano or Julie Locascio. (“I could do it in an hour if there were no calls coming in, but of course there always are,” she says.) These cameras are indispensable tools so they are a priority for Rhonda, right behind her switchboard duties.

She maintains the in/out log of Main Office employees, tracking where they are and when they are expected to return. She transfers calls to and from company cars, projects and plants. She reconciles auto travel logs and tracks down the wayward employee when they’re needed by someone. She takes lunch orders and sees that they’re correct when delivered (“How I ended up with that job I don’t know,” she quips.)

She collects cash for dress-down Friday, reserves and juggles conference rooms, researches company contact info for employees on the road, stuffs outgoing mailers, prints paper driving maps for those who don’t quite trust their GPSs. A hodge-podge of items – blueprints, documents, keys, cards, gym clothes – are dropped at the main desk and entrusted to Rhonda for safe forwarding to their destinations.

Some years back when it was new and enticing, the company considered changing to an automated answering system. It was rejected by company officers and that suits Rhonda: “That’s too impersonal. You have all kinds of people calling up, you have emergencies, you miss the contact.”

Not infrequently, discretion is called for when Rhonda is “filtering.” To whom should a particular call be routed? How much should be said, how should it be said, what should not be repeated? She reads situations quickly and handles them discreetly – when a family member with important news calls in urgently looking for an employee, for instance.

In 18 years manning the front desk Rhonda has heard some strange things, some so “off” they transcend the cheesy and sleazy and reach the comical. Like the salesman, trying to gin up a false familiarity, who called in to speak with his “good friend” and could she please pass him through? That “friend,” sadly she informed him, had passed away six months earlier. Or the woman about whom Rhonda had been warned by another O&G location, calling with outlandish questions about making asphalt. Undeterred by her first failed run at the recipe, she was pressing the 7 A.M. girl hard for answers. In broken English, with a man’s muffled voice prompting her from the background, she insisted on knowing the temperature asphalt had to reach to work. She didn’t need to say she wanted to cook up her own asphalt but Rhonda knew. The E-Z Bake Asphalt Plant was not going to happen on her watch.

“Our office number is close to a doctor’s in town. People call and want me to read their MRI results. Sometimes they get indignant when I try to explain that we aren’t the doctor.” They are usually elderly callers, and she has a soft spot in her heart for them: she worked in a nursing home before joining O&G. “So I just say, ‘I know that number, I’ll connect you.’ It also happens with area businesses. “It’s happened often enough that I’ll know who they’re looking and get the caller the number.”

Many years ago Rhonda rode out a divorce and found herself single with two small children to support. She didn’t cave. She dug in and supplemented the 45-hour-a-week O&G provided with part-time work. For years she cooked and tended bar at taverns and clubs in Torrington. Now, with her son and daughter grown and working and with financial pressures relaxed a bit, she has cut back on the extra jobs. She still works gigs selectively, mainly because she enjoys being with people. Her smile from across the bar is proof.
In a non-descript conference room at the O&G project offices of Contract E, the largest road job ever undertaken in Connecticut, John Gemetro is talking about the changing of times. Vice President of the Heavy Highway Division, he is also this mammoth job’s Project Executive, carrying an imprimatur that gives him authority to make decisions, some of them very large, on behalf of the company. Gemetro joined O&G in 1977. He is among a small cadre of very long-term employees. He carries around corporate history in his head. He’s remembering the first road job he managed, where he and one project engineer worked out of a job trailer in Danbury, supported by a project manager from the Main Office in Torrington who was directing several other projects simultaneously.

“An awful lot has changed,” Gemetro understates. What used to be two men running a road job in the field is today 21 at Contract E. This might be an example grabbed from the far end of the bell curve, but it nonetheless exemplifies the trend to multilayered, redundant responsibilities in project management. It is the fruit of a few anomalous but high-profile failures, along with agency cost cutting and staff trimming, aided by simple technological advancements.

Catalysts

One could argue that the movement towards greater detailed oversight of all aspects of civil projects would have happened all on its own. But a pair of high-profile events certainly gave that movement urgency.

Before the early morning hours of June 28, 1983, only locals knew of the Mianus River that arcs through Cos Cob and under I-95. But when a decaying pin-and-hanger assembly gave out under the pressure of a pair of tractor trailers and a car driving on the 100-foot bridge deck it held aloft, the deck and vehicles fell 70 feet to the water below. The Mianus River Bridge became an unfortunate poster child. It drew national media attention and the outrage of politicians and bureaucrats who instituted not just an investigation of the incident (blocked drains caused pins and hangers to rust and the thoroughly corroded pins had evaded detection in routine inspections) but also a multi-billion-dollar, nationwide bridge inspection and repair program.

Fast-forward 25 years. On I-84 to the east of Waterbury, deficient workmanship by a contractor and failed inspections performed by the owner’s consultant had created and then missed potentially hazardous conditions: 275 of 300 storm drains on the three-mile stretch of highway were either not built or structurally unsound. When the first sink hole that resulted from improper drainage was noticed, the severity of the problem was uncovered. (O&G was hired to build and restore the drains to proper function.) Again an anomalous situation created an unwanted high profile.

Simultaneously during these decades the DOT was under pressure to trim costs. One area sliced back was payroll. In two major waves, long-term employees were incentivized into early retirement. The number of experienced DOT employees available for assignment to the kinds of road projects O&G was building, from engineers to inspectors to project managers, dwindled. And while the number of DOT personnel who performed key functions shrank, the key functions themselves did not; in fact, in response to incidents like Mianus and I-84, the requirements for design, quality control, inspection and reporting became more numerous and more stringent.

The state began hiring consultants to perform what they used to self-perform. The nonstop transfer of responsibility was well underway. “The 33-33-33 split of shared responsibility that was between the state, the designer and the contractor became 60-40 with the contractor taking on more of the load,” says Gemetro.

The shift increased administrative requirements dramatically, particularly communications (read paperwork) and documentation (read paperwork). Computers and emails replaced the typewriters and carbon paper that had endured into the 1980s. There was little to hold back the flood of administration and more reason to expect it.
Open Doors

As early as 1995 the state began to specify new contractually required administrative positions that would need to be staffed by any contractor with whom it would partner on civil projects. It began with major projects and has been exerting itself downward to civil work valued at a fraction of that cost.

The project coordinator was the first position enumerated. In 1995 O&G had its first project coordinator on the I-95 Yellow Mill Project. In subsequent years the new positions of document control specialist, quality control manager and work-site traffic coordinator followed. As Gemetro sees it, civil projects in the ’70s and ’80s ran at a 90:10 ratio for the cost of actual construction work compared to administration; today that mix has swung the other direction and is more like 40:60.

At its discretion, depending on the scope of a job, the state could specify that any number of these “fixed pay item” administrative positions be filled. This has opened opportunities for contractors to hire to fill the slots or to cross-train employees to execute the specific duties. This in turn made field construction more accessible to women who by and large had supported projects from a distance or on-site in more limited capacities.

Today O&G is leading three road projects and a hybridized road-and-building job for ConnDOT. The Heavy Civil Division is building highways, interchanges, bridges and medians in New Haven on I-95 and Route 3 (Contract E), in Norwalk on I-95, and on the Merritt Parkway in Stamford and New Canaan. Also in New Haven, a mile or so from the project offices of Contract E, the Building and Heavy Civil Divisions together are constructing a new rail yard.

At each worksite O&G personnel are executing the duties of these administrative positions. We spoke with a group of them about what they do.

Project Coordinator. The New Haven Rail Yard Facilities Improvements Project was Jeremy Szep’s entree into the role of project coordinator. Although he had been a project engineer in the Building Division since 2002, posted primarily to school construction jobs, he had been focusing on project scheduling for about a year when he was assigned to coordinate at the rail yard in 2010. Before that he travelled between different projects preparing and maintaining their schedules. In New Haven, after completing specific training, Szep uses more sophisticated software called Primavera and its P6 module that supports complex scheduling and coordination tasks. The Primavera suite is used by all parties on the job. Highly interactive and suited to large civil projects, Primavera permits document submission and access so everyone has the most current data available to them.

ConnDOT, like project co-owner Metro North Railroad, is a civil construction entity. But because a 300,000SF facility for maintaining the line’s newest generation of rail cars, storing extra parts and providing administrative space is the bulk of the project, the Building Division has the lead. About 80% of O&G personnel on site come from the Building Division; the Heavy Civil Division provides the balance.

The majority of what Szep does as project coordinator is scheduling. The ideal is to build a master critical path method (CPM) schedule as a common framework. All parties use it to plan their specific work milestones, determine when they need to order materials or mobilize equipment, sequence particular subcontractor services, procure materials – and to interact as efficiently as possible. Szep prepared that schedule, interprets it and modifies it.

In regularly scheduled meetings O&G and owner representatives would sit down to discuss changes made to the schedule and changes they desire to be made. Szep would list them and submit his list for owner representative approval before modifying the master schedule.

Project coordinators would be responsible for coordinating and expediting all phases of the work. They would see that the schedule is maintained. They would hold monthly schedule updates and be part of weekly meetings with all subcon-
tractors to discuss progress so he could prepare weekly “look-ahead” schedules and coordinate the work the tradesmen would be doing.

The back-and-forth pressures of the contract, now in its fourth year, have been a challenge for all, including Szep. Incomplete design documents and the difficulty of defining, timely decisions by architectural and engineering firms, on-site inspection teams and ConnDOT have made it a difficult project to manage. “How my job started here and how it is now are different,” says Szep. “I’ve always focused on the best way to get a job done.”

**Document Control Specialist.** Robin Listorti in New Haven and Michelle Keene in Norwalk are document control specialists with just the right acumen for the position.

Asked if she is a detail-oriented person, Listorti exclaims, “Oh yeah! You have to be to do this job. Everything I do is about numbers.” Keene agrees. “If I wasn’t detail-oriented I’d be going crazy, especially here since I do document control and other things for two projects at the same time,” referring to the I-95 and Merritt Parkway projects she jointly administers.

What is it that a document control specialist is responsible for? According to a ConnDOT document entitled, “Item #0969950A,” they “prepare, status, electronically file and send all project correspondence and drawings utilizing a document control system as established and maintained by the Department.” The specialist makes sure that all contract documents are processed correctly and in a timely way. Listorti compares it to being a hub for information. All contract documentation flows in and out of her station and she maintains order.

The specialist’s primary tool is Oracle’s Primavera Contract Manager (PCM) software. She and Keene access PCM over the internet and rely on it all day. For Keene, who is new to document control, learning PCM came easily as did Listorti, though she likens it to learning chess. “We took classes but it’s like chess: you can know the pieces but you don’t really ‘get it’ until you start playing the game. On Contract E I’ve gotten in-depth knowledge of the system because this is such a massive project and the volume of documentation is huge. It’s basically what I do all day.”

Keene sees herself as a liaison between ConnDOT with its documentation requirements and the O&G engineers whom she assists with a motherly familiarity. “These guys are so busy I try to be someone who can get the info to move back and forth quickly. Instead of having six of our guys making individual submittals they send them to me. I make sure I see that what needs to be there is there. I provide a double-check before it goes back out to the DOT,” adding with a bit of a smirk, “and I don’t have to check up on these guys too much.”

Documentation includes transmittals and submittals, meeting minutes, memos from the field, letters, notices, punch lists and requests for information and for changes. It’s all logged and stored by number. “Everything is numbers in this system,” Listorti says. “I package documents from the engineers in the right format and get them into the system, which can be a process. You need to know the correct package number for everything.” Sending a document to ConnDOT in an incorrect format or manner can delay the Department’s response from 15 to 30 days.

Keene takes it upon herself to have all her contract documentation in one location that all the engineers can see. “I take the files that come back from the DOT and load them onto a shared server so any of these guys can go back and see what was submitted and what was approved.” She does it to make access easier for the team. True to form she says, “I like to have it all organized in one place.” The mark of an administrator.

“The DOT has been fabulous to work with,” concludes Listorti. “They’re really good and on top of things. We have the greatest guys here at the joint venture, too – they’re knowledgeable and so easy to work with.” And in Norwalk, though the arrangement differs, the end is the same. “I work with the people at the DOT and we all have a good rapport.”

**Maintenance and Protection of Traffic (MPT) Coordinator.** If there was ever a road job that needed an administrator solely dedicated to traffic safety and flow it would be Contract E. Working out of a spacious office wall papered with traffic maps and crowded with multiple monitors and abundant memorabilia, Joe Sefcik is that administrator.

Sefcik simplifies what he does: “My main responsibility here is controlling traffic. Anytime there is a traffic pattern to be put out on the highway I’m responsible for coming up with the design using ConnDOT contract drawings, AutoCAD and MUTCD standards. It sounds trite but anytime you put cones out on the road there’s a right way. It’s standardized.”

Sefcik continues: “What we have here is a big bowl of spaghetti. A lot of the work doesn’t fit into a tidy package,” he says, gesturing to the traffic plans taped to a big swath of the wall with fluorescent colors highlighting the lane changes he’s designed for the largest traffic shift yet on this job, coming up this fall. It will be a change that, instead of taking the usual night to execute will require a weekend to complete. “When you’re driving home at night blame me if you get caught in a traffic jam,” he smiles.

Sefcik’s background in traffic control began after his years at the Route 7 Extension Project in Brookfield, for which he was a project engineer, came to a close. That was when O&G aligned him for a new assignment, sending him to training led by the American Traffic Safety Services Association. Then he was posted to Contract E.

As MPT Coordinator he is in regular contact with ConnDOT personnel. Sefcik’s traffic management plans require the interplay of minds to be sure no significant details are overlooked.

Planning begins months in advance, giving enough time to spot potential issues. Before any plans are sent to ConnDOT he reviews them with Pete Hinman, the job’s Worksite Traffic Supervisor. Hinman will be handed the responsibility for making it happen on the highway. “Will that plan work, does it make sense, is the timeframe going to work?” are the kinds of things he looks to Hinman to answer. They both know, however, that even the most cleanly orchestrated plan may need to be revamped on the fly when it bumps into real-life conditions.

Because the project is situated in a highly congested urban area, the plans also need to dovetail with any rail, port or city activities and events that the road work might impact. “If I spot something that looks out of place I’ll engage with the state and ask for clarification on why they planned the work the way they
he collects them to test how much stress and strain the concrete can endure before failing. In the rare case of a flaw, he directs that a repair be made to the bridge or road surface. There have been no issues at E with the numerous large structures O&G is building like piles, pier columns and caps, footings or abutment walls, or the bridge decks which run up to 150 feet long, 75 feet wide and 16 inches deep.

Drake pulls a photo up on his monitor in the narrow office he shares with Quality Control Engineer John Rentschler to illustrate an issue he’s in the middle of correcting. It’s a closeup of a joint where spalling over the winter has crumbled some concrete. It isn’t particularly large, about the size of a large deep-dish pizza. “It’s a minor detail but we still have to fix it.” Pointing to where two surfaces meet, he continues: “We’re probably going to ask the owner for a design change so it doesn’t happen again.”

Drake stresses how essential proper documentation is to the quality function. “My calibration data, field memos, reports, letters – everything gets a specific item number matched to it by Robin Listorti and she submits it to ConnDOT through PCM. PCM lets you track everything anyone has entered. This job is very busy so it’s a real asset to have.”

And then he laughs. “Just remember if you’re not sure about submitting something, don’t submit it. I just send my documents to Robin. If she finds a problem she sends the thing back to me, I fix it, then she submits. It’s worth your while getting it right before sending it over because the DOT’s going to send it back. The three letters you don’t want to see are ‘RRR’ – revise, requires resubmission.”

The relationship between Drake and his ConnDOT counterparts is healthy. If they spot an issue they call Drake and tell him about it. “That’s the kind of attitude we all have. I get as many phone calls from the chief inspectors as I do from our own people,” he says, pulling out his cell phone to illustrate the point – and to check for any recent calls that might have just come in. Drake deliberately attends to emails and phone calls. It makes for good relationships.

Meanwhile, over in Norwalk, Brian DePerry spends his time between two job trailers parked in front of the Merritt, and DePerry more on I-95. DePerry checks on the work, making sure all concerns they might have without interfering with the work being performed. The inspectors know they can talk to us first and we can likely prevent any delay.”

Coming Down the Pike

Before Gemetro retires he expects to see other big shifts in responsibility and administration in civil projects for the state. ConnDOT is already discussing two significant departures.

The first would be running a project in CM (construction manager) At-Risk mode. States from Florida to California and, closer to home, Maine, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, have authorized CM At-Risk projects for some time. With CM At-Risk ConnDOT would select a contract manager, who would advise during the design as to constructibility, cost and schedule. When a guaranteed maximum price is arrived at, the contract becomes a cost-plus contract. It is “at risk” because the contractor assumes responsibility for the performance of all work, subcontractors’ included.

The second method would be to let future road and bridge jobs as design-build work. Design-build would do several beneficial things. It would reduce a job’s overall delivery schedule by overlapping the design and construction phases. It would also shift construction responsibility further off ConnDOT and onto a single contractor and trim costs.

In either methodology the emphasis is on streamlining the approach by concentrating responsibility for more functions – planning, design, actual construction and administration – in one company. It benefits the owner by creating a single source with overall responsibility and in so doing reduces its own exposure to risk and lowers project cost. It is an approach Gemetro would welcome for the same sort of reasons: it will empower O&G with more control over the work, with the expectation of lowering risk and trimming cost. Time will tell.
The Building Division is often hired to be an owner’s advocate as a construction manager. Invited into the development process, the Division’s experienced personnel can spot and prevent potential issues from ever becoming problems in the field. As the project unfolds, the construction management team enforces the design standards. For instance, when contractors propose items to use in meeting the architect’s design the CM screens those items to ensure they meet the requirements and will work with the design. Flagging non-conformances before they move off paper saves time and money and improves project quality. Once a project is being built, O&G CM teams have a new tool at their disposal: the iPad. Joe Vetro manages the Naugatuck High School project and appreciates the efficiencies of the iPad. He says he and his key personnel walk the site every day with iPad in hand. “We use a program called BIM360,” says Vetro. “With it we can access everything we need – the plans, specifications, submittals. When we spot an issue, that same program lets us write it up, take a picture with the iPad and email the issue to the responsible contractor. Then we track it from that point until it’s corrected. It’s fast and accurate. It eliminates making and managing Excel spreadsheets which frees up more time for us to watch quality.”

Jan Vlasto is a CPA and a CIA (Certified Internal Auditor). He is also O&G’s Controller, tasked, among other things, with helping keep the company’s financial house in order. Through years of work auditing the financial performance of various firms, Vlasto has been intrigued with the root causes of certain financial woes. He sees a link between mere numbers and the human behavior they reflect. After attending a forum on fraud, Vlasto had this to say: “Reducing the risk of fraud depends on the company clearly communicating to every employee and every subcontractor that it is their duty to report fraud. If they know or suspect something, they are obligated to say something. There should be a very clear, safe and confidential means for individuals to communicate this information.” With such a vehicle already in place at O&G – the Ethics Hotline (see page 15) – employees can do the right thing discreetly. Vlasto cites Luis Ramos, the CEO of a firm that manages corporate risk, on the benefits of having a way to do the right thing anonymously: “Employees are less likely to look the other way when seeing wrongdoing…and seem to have a higher willingness to act as the eyes and ears of the organization to detect fraud in the workplace.” If you see something, please say something!

On the evening of April 22, the Safety Department held its quarterly meeting for the Materials Division in Waterbury. Sean McNeill, Corporate Safety Manager, began addressing the packed room by asking, “How do we make safety a reality – how do we take all our programs and directives and create real effects in our day-to-day operations?” In answering the question the meeting focused on two points: perception and teamwork. Brad Oneglia, Assistant Vice President in the Materials Division, spoke about perception, using visuals displayed from his laptop (including the famous drawing of a couple that shows them either old or young depending on one’s perception). The take-away: we must not assume that just because we notice something that everyone else has seen the same thing. In a safety culture everyone supports each other and we do not hesitate to take steps that help keep each other safe. “Safety starts with personal responsibility, not just for your own safety but for the safety of those around you,” said Oneglia. The Safety Department’s programs can only have real impact when everyone on site is assessing the workplace regarding their safe practices. Seeing things from multiple perspectives, communicating what you see and working together to keep everyone safe on the job are fundamental elements of a safety culture.

Productivity can’t be pursued in isolation on any job, says John Gemetro, Vice President, Heavy Civil Division. Productivity goes hand-in-hand with quality; merely getting more work done in less time ignores the matter of quality, which in the long run is of greater value than productivity. It’s a balancing act. At the O&G/TPC joint venture in New Haven, Gemetro, Project Manager Michael Daley and General Superintendent Larry Doyon have that balance locked in. Their team is five weeks ahead of schedule. Of the twelve stages that demarcate the project, they are performing Stage Three – but have completed 57% of Stage 4A, 48% of Stage 4B, 25% of Stage 5A and 42% of Stage 6A. How did they reach that kind of productivity? By bringing their expertise to bear and modifying the schedule to be more productive in each of the preceding stages, reducing the overall project duration. Structures Superintendent Bob Nardi and Civil Superintendent Bill Noll have played a key part by ensuring, week by week, that their goals have been achieved. The project engineering staff has also made sure that the crews in the field have all the approvals and materials they require in a timely fashion. Quality at the project has been exemplary: with more than $200M worth of work performed to-date there have been no non-conformance notices.
SAFETY AND ETHICS ARE CORNERSTONES OF OUR CULTURE AT O&G INDUSTRIES.

Our Safety and Ethics Hotline provides a means by which you can provide DIRECT, CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS regarding issues and ideas related to these essential topics.

SAFETY and ETHICS Hotline
(860) 496-4866

Witty Ditty Earns Group Gratis Grub

Along about this last Halloween the creative minds from Credit & Collections were bubbling like a cauldron. Together they composed a short poem and faxed it off to the local Litchfield radio station’s “Lunch Bunch” contest in high hopes their entry would capture that week’s complimentary catered lunch. Their creation was indeed deemed tasteful enough to take the prize: a chicken marsala and baked ziti spread for 15 prepared by Scarpelli’s Restaurant. Here’s their winning rhyme:

Credit and Collections is the place to be, if you work at O&G.  
We start each morning promptly at eight, anxious to start our day we’re never late.  
Collection calls are not much fun, but it’s our job to get it done.  
All day long we are on the phone, until we are paid we cannot leave you alone.  
We have a great team, led by a cool dude, it would make him so happy to have some Lunch Bunch food.  
We’re really hungry and Scarpelli’s is where we want to be, so pick our entry, WZBG.

Spray Away!

The new spray booth at South Main, built between January and April, is already relieving bottlenecks for vehicle painting (see “Metamorphosis, page 16”). Two of its most impressive features are the intake and exhaust systems. The intake has a 1,500,000 BTU, natural-gas-fired air makeup unit for heat and outside air supply. The exhaust system has two 30-inch stacks. When painters finish they flip a switch for “bake mode” and the intake and exhaust motors gradually wind down in sync to maintain a pressure balance while the paint cures. Lighting and air filtration are state-of-the-art as well.

Enjoying the fruits of their labor. (left to right) Cathy Thomas, Lisa Canfield, Jared Smith, Kim Lukcso, George Lincoln, Karen Obar, Joe Metzger, Lucia Videtto, Paul Patch and Dan Cretella.

New spray booth on line at South Main. Don Drost, retired master vehicle painter (right), came to check on his protegee, Doug Owens, and the booth with features any painter would love.
It’s always dark outside when Bret and Eric Romer start their winter work day. The father-son mechanics let themselves into the South Main Maintenance Facility, flick on the overhead lights and get back into their work which, most days for the past year and a half, has been tearing down and rebuilding the older mixers in O&G’s fleet of 95.

In the summer of 2012 the senior Romer, Bret, spotted a severely cracked frame rail (two, 33-foot-long steel rails run the length of the machine and are its backbone) on Mixer #3-63-141, parked at the shop for another repair. After deliberation by management, #3-63-141, it was decided, would be gutted and rebuilt. It was the first mixer rebuild Romer would do; there would be five more rebuilt and put back on the road over the next year-and-half. There will be many more following, including the three in various states of reconstruction at South Main.

The company is targeting 12 mixer rebuilds a year and figuring out how to make that happen. Rebuilds have been averaging the Romers ten weeks per mixer.

One production bottleneck – the sandblasting, cleaning and painting of the hundreds of parts that are reused on each machine – is on its way to resolution. This March a new paint booth was built. This 27-by-12-foot facility, with color-corrected lighting and a dedicated air handler, is used for painting smaller vehicles and equipment. It is opening up space in the existing high-bay areas, the only shop in which tall equipment like mixers and triaxles can fit.

To say that the Romers rebuild mixers paints an incomplete picture. While they are the hub of the enterprise, they have been supported all along by the skills of key individuals, including Don Drost (recently retired) and Doug Owens. They do the dirty work of sandblasting and cleaning the recycled parts and the beautiful work of applying sealer, a half-dozen gallons of fresh glossy paint and new decals. “Ben Gordon also does a superior job,” says Jim Zambro, V.P. and the South Main facility manager. “He’s our purchasing agent. Ben makes sure that any new parts we need are in the shop and ready when Bret and Eric need them.” Zambro’s own involvement in the mixer refurbs was front-loaded. He researched the best way to proceed and put the program into play, remaining involved with project oversight and paint shop production. Keith Woolford, Shop Foreman for On-Road Equipment, has his hands in the mix daily, guiding the workflow, keeping tabs on purchasing, arranging donor mixers and doing lots of scheduling. “Keith keeps the whole shop running at the same time,” adds Zambro.

Bret Romer has been repairing trucks for a living since 1986, starting on tractor trailers and then dumps, loaders and mixers before coming to O&G 13 years ago. Tearing things down to bits and pieces and meticulously repairing, revitalizing and reassembling to better-than-new is second nature to him. He was a hands-down choice for mixer rebuilding according to Woolford and Zambro. “He pays attention to detail. No trucks come back that Bret has worked on. He cares a lot about the work he puts out, he takes ownership. He comes here to work and gives a full eight hours every single day,” Zambro says. Woolford agrees. “Bret takes real pride in his work and his knowledge of trucks is very impressive. His work is outstanding – he never takes shortcuts and it shows.”

Eric Romer graduated home high school in 2013. Attentive, hard working, quiet and quick to smile, he’s registered in a state-approved apprenticeship program and well on his way to becoming a Class II mechanic, a process through which he’ll log the required 6,000 hours of hands-on experience and another 2,000 hours of classroom instruction. He began working part-time at a nearby trucking company but one year ago South Main became Eric’s first full-time job.

The idea of a rebuild is simple: take an aging machine, strip it down, repair or replace the worn components and put it all back together good as new. But seeing the process makes you appreciate the skill of the rebuild team – like Metamorphosis

Bret and Eric Romer are the hub of a team giving tired mixers second lives
watching someone who is good and fast at solving puzzles or finding Waldo. It seems daunting when the hundreds of parts involved in a typical rebuild are stacked row upon row, on shelves, spread on the floor, moved to and from painting, arriving on flatbeds. Keeping it all organized and flowing is impressive, and even more so when there are multiple mixers being resurrected at once. “There are always two rebuilds happening at a time,” says Romer, about as matter-of-factly as you’d say you’re having a ham sandwich for lunch.

The rebuild starts with pulling off the mixer’s hopper and drum. Next the fenders and side brackets, the entire driver’s cab and the engine package come off. That leaves the two main rails, crossmembers and a web of wiring harnesses, air lines, hoses and valves, all of which are removed. “Then we cut up the rails,” says Bret, “get the rears out, put the reusable stuff on pallets to go to sandblast and painting. And then we go the opposite way.”

Reassembly begins with the new rails, which are new from Oshkosh as part of a kit. (Every mixer in the O&G fleet is an Oshkosh Model S2346.) “We save the old cab, which gets taken apart, cleaned, painted and put back together. The rears we reuse, same with the transfer cases, engine package and transmission package,” he says.

Keith Woolford and Bret Romer

metamorphosis of #210
top to bottom

Mixer #210 with disassembly underway
- Frame rails with air tanks and drive train assembly begun
- Installation of engine and transmission module
- Final stages, aligning rebuilt drum with drive motor on reassembled frame
- Decaled, lubricated, inspected and ready for a second service life
When it’s all back together, the mixer heads to Owens’ bays for the decaling and logos that will brand it distinctively O&G. Next it goes to lubrication specialist Alan Tracy for routine fluid and grease service, and then back to the Romers for a final inspection before rolling away into full-time use.

The life of a mixer is reckoned not by miles traveled but by hours in service. A rule of thumb, 2,000 hours equals one year of service life. Since 2004 Zambero has been wringing more life out of each unit. 2008, in fact, was the last year that new mixers were purchased. In 2012 the focus turned to rebuilding. Wringing a second life cycle from a rebuilt machine is proving worthwhile. The layout for parts and labor in a rebuild runs about $110,000; buying a new mixer costs $240,000. The fuel efficiency of a well-tuned older engine can also be higher than that of the newer models, says Bret.

As the team finds ways to tweak the efficiency of rebuilding, the new paint booth comes up to speed and a second rebuilding crew led by veteran mechanic John Kiyak comes on line, hitting the lofty target of 12 mixer rebuilds every year is looking more and more doable.

By the numbers
The South Main Maintenance Facility keeps detailed records on each mixer it rebuilds. Here are some of the more interesting ones.

| 11 | New wiring harnesses with hundreds of feet of wire in each |
| 600 | Feet of new air lines run |
| 320 | Feet of new hydraulic lines run, making up forty new hoses |
| 520 | Replacement nuts and bolts needed |
| 384 | Replacement parts needed, from a few dollars to $8500 for a new drum |
| 52 to 48 | The average cost ratio for a rebuild, labor to parts |

Broken frame
The most common reason a mixer needs a rebuild

16,000 to 23,000
Range of hours worked when mixers have needed a rebuild – the same as the life expectancy of a rebuild

5
The number of mixers that have been rebuilt and put back on the road. Numbers 6 and 7 are being rebuilt now.

700
The number of man hours put into a typical rebuild

MASONRY DIVISION

Experience all around

Masonry Division sales and service professionals bring their expertise to solving challenges and building relationships as they keep their customers’ projects on track

Exceptional customer service will always be a critical competitive advantage for any business.

In the Masonry Division, excellent customer service is the norm at every step of the transaction, from sales and support to the delivery of product. It is excellence built on a foundation of experience, the “wisdom of the workplace” that only comes from employees who have been steeped in the O&G culture for years. It is an acquired mastery of product lines and the know-how to put it all together.

Customers notice this expansive experience base and rely on it again and again. Combine it with the Division’s unique offerings, custom fabrication capability and installation expertise and no big box store can compete. As the Masonry Division team meets the challenges of its customers’ projects, long-term relationships develop.

In the competitive world of masonry product sales, the experience of Masonry Division professionals is a tremendous resource for customers in need of unique solutions. The Division boasts many employees whose tenures at O&G are counted not in years but decades. We asked a few of them, representing the different phases of project fulfillment, for their thoughts on what they do and the differences they make to their customers.
Sales. In 1996 Scott Alvarez moved into sales for the growing Masonry Division. He had been working, for about ten years, in purchasing at South Main. What he found in the Masonry Division was what he loved to do: building relationships and providing solutions. “Make a customer, not a sale” could be his motto. Alvarez would meet with masons, architects and specifiers every day to understand their needs and to forecast local trends. Alvarez has been there as O&G grew to be a complete resource and consultant to the region’s top architects designing residential, commercial and municipal projects.

Purchasing. Purchasing Manager Alan Brennan began at the Division’s then-largest facility, the mason supply store and masonry products showroom in Waterbury, in 1990. He was well suited to finding new manufacturers and partners who were the right fit for the company’s plans for expansion and service into the growing architectural market. Brennan is a support to the dedicated sales professionals who deal directly with local, regional and national architects to secure significant projects. Solid relationships with this higher-end market are essential and add to the central relationships the Division has always had with masons. These masons, as Brennan puts it, “ultimately provide us with our livelihood.” He continues: “We have influence with suppliers and some of our lines are exclusive in the state but demands from our customers have become more challenging. Our brick projects are ordered on a project-by-project basis, they are spec-designed and quality and appearance are musts. Some materials also need to meet LEED criteria,” he says. He meets the challenges of getting clients what they need every day.

Yard Support. Bill Young is a 27-year O&G veteran. He has done a variety of things, from driving to loading and unloading trucks to working the counter at supply yards to filling the role of operations manager at Bogue Road. Through it all he has gained an appreciation for the uniqueness of the company. “I see how different O&G is from the big box stores. We build relationships with our customers. They become our friends. I’ve been to their kids’ weddings, been invited to their homes, vacationed with a few, attended a few funerals. Every day I get to work with our customers. We earn their trust and we really are like a family.”

Facility Management. Dani Alves will reach 20 years with O&G in short order. He has managed the Bridgeport Mason Store and Showroom since 2006. On-the-job observations have taught Alves real-world lessons that his business management studies could not, at least not with the same impact. His years of experience show when he speaks of the philosophy behind how the Division does business. “It is critical on any masonry project, big or small, that we put our customers at ease. We give them real answers about what products will be best for their needs and they learn that they can place their trust in us. Our customers feel secure with our knowledge.”

Industry change is inevitable, but Alves says his customers know that O&G is “here for the long haul” and that is part of what keeps his customers at ease and coming back. They feel comfortable knowing that the company has been through change before. “I’m proud to be an employee and I know for a fact that our customers are proud to be associated with us,” he says. “They know we supply them with quality materials and they’re secure with the support we give them whenever they need it. When they purchase their materials from O&G they also know they’ll be at their job site when they’re needed.”

Delivery. Jim Duffy has 30 years of experience driving for O&G. He’s been behind the wheel of mixers and flatbeds but now mostly makes deliveries with his boom truck. He sees himself as a player on an experienced team of purchasing, sales and support professionals – the final link in the chain that keeps both architectural and everyday customers satisfied. “When I show up on a job site with the materials they’ve ordered our customers are happy to see me.” He’s needed his over-the-road experience and skill at maneuvering a loaded, 40-ton boom truck into tight spots to get materials exactly to where the masons need them dropped – it’s a final touch that his customers appreciate.
A 2010 study published in the “Harvard Business Review” summarizes it this way: “Wellness programs have often been viewed as a nice extra, not a strategic imperative. But the return on investment on comprehensive, well-run employee wellness programs can be as high as six-to-one.”

For Dan Carey, Barbara Weingart, Sharon Okraska and their fellow volunteers who make up the O&G Wellness Committee, the quest for healthy living is anything but a chore. It’s an upbeat way of life. It’s reflected in the Committee’s monthly luncheon meetings where all gather to report, strategize and mix it up. There is a chemistry in the meetings: they are focused but lighthearted, run to a detailed agenda with plenty of room for everyone to speak their minds and throw ideas into the mix. The target of each meeting: moving the wellness ball up the health field to the end zone of optimized health and wellness for their coworker friends and, by extension, their families.

The Wellness Committee was formed at O&G in 2007 with a handful of volunteers serving the brand new O&G iHealth Wellness Program. It has grown steadily and now comprises a 14-person committee with representatives from each company division. They meet monthly on their lunch hour.

Wellness programs are not in every business in America, not by a long shot. About half of America’s mid-size companies have one and the number dwindles the smaller the companies get. But O&G management understands the wisdom of providing one for employees. It’s a win-win business decision where both the company as an entity and the employees who are the company benefit. There are also several financial incentives in reduced insurance premiums for participants. When workers are fit and feeling good, productivity on the job rises, insurance premiums drop and morale, camaraderie, quality of life and a sense of vitality and happiness reach new, higher levels.

It’s not just at work that employees feel the wellness boost. Bobby Gant, Assistant Manager of the Stamford Mason Store, has been active in the company’s wellness programs the last few years. “It’s made me very aware of what I eat and it’s allowed me to pass these new habits on to my family. We all read labels now – we’d never do that before. We research the ingredients and avoid things that harm our health long-term.” He’s gone from 213 pounds down to 183, just about what he weighed when he graduated high school 27 years ago.

Safety Superintendent Caswell Sewell agrees. He was named the company’s “Wellness Achiever of the Year” for 2013. “I lost 30 pounds and I’m maintaining that. It’s been a benefit to me and my family because we’re all eating healthier. We do the program together.”

The Committee brings its collective creativity to bear on all kinds of hurdles, the chief one being natural human inertia and stubborn resistance to changing one’s lifestyle. They realize that it is the hard-to-initiate course corrections that point one into healthier living, that reset the aging clock and add years of health, productivity and zest back into lives. It can be small incremental steps – slight edges – that pay wellness dividends over time, like simply walking regularly.

Or something more dramatic, with a higher corporate profile, like O&G’s own version of “The Biggest Loser.” Now in its third year, Biggest Loser contestants form teams and vie for prizes, not the least of which being the year-long bragging rights that come to the team that’s shed more unhealthy pounds than any other. This year, ten teams took the challenge, dropping a collective 735 pounds. The victor was “Weapons of ASS Reduction,” captained by Caswell Sewell, who left behind 16.84% of their combined weight.

Another outreach of the Wellness Committee, new this winter, is its “iHealth & Wellness Newsletter,” the creation of Julie Locascio, Anita Goerig and Ken Faroni. It is emailed every other month and focuses on wellness and motivation, from healthful eating factoids and exercise tips to reports of program events and upcoming promotions, it encourages greater and greater awareness of the decisions that make for healthy living. “I really enjoy being part of a great team of people who care about the best interests of other employees,” says Locascio.

Events designed to overcome lifestyle-related diseases run non-stop, year round. When one event is winding down, the Wellness Committee has another prepped and in the wings ready to launch in its place. The impetus is maintaining
a level of motivation and interest and even enjoyment that induces employees to jump in, time after time.

On April 7, for instance, the 2014 edition of “Start! Walking” began. This year five teams, with names like “Boston Red Hot Chili Steppers” and “Boston Road Sox,” totaling 57 employees from various sites, began their virtual trek in sunny Miami. 1,530 miles later it will end in Boston. After the first two weeks of the walk they had travelled an impressive, collective 1540.18 miles (27.02 miles on average per person). The Coastline Cruisers were in the early lead with 333.47 miles on their pedometers.

Contests often serve the dual purpose of health and charitable work. For instance, at City Place 1 in Hartford this April 5, a team from O&G took the “Fight for Air Climb” challenge and fought gravity up 34 flights of stairs looking to best their personal times. “I took second place in my division,” boasted a trim and fit Ken Faroni who pulled the group together for the event, adding, “Of course, there were only two of us in it.” The $1010 the team raised went to the American Lung Association.

Members of the Committee are drawn mostly from the Main Office. At its January meeting, as the Committee gathered at a long conference table for a healthy soup-and-salad lunch, among the items considered were ways to spread their message more effectively into all company locations – how to make it easier for participation at locations that are more remote from the Main Office.

Given the creativity and vitality of the committee that steers it, expect the wellness initiative to continue spreading throughout the corporation.
It was a real departure for **JIM HARDY** in 2007 when he left the manufacturing world, where he had labored in various capacities all his adult life, and landed in the mail room at the Main Office as an Administrative Assistant. It was a switch he loved. “Working for Lydia [Babbitt] was a totally new thing. Completely different responsibilities. It was cleaner, neater and more regular – regular hours, same start and stop times, no weekends – all the things manufacturing did not have.” His greatest satisfaction came from the people he dealt with every day: everybody from the top to the bottom and everyone in between, as he puts it. “If I wasn’t at the bottom of the totem pole I was close to it, and everybody would still listen to me when I had a suggestion. It was great.” He remembers the blizzard last February, arriving at the Main Office before 5 A.M. and pushing two feet of snow off the top of the mail room box truck before making his appointed run. He had plowed his way as far as Woodbury, Southbury and New Milford and was crawling to Danbury when Lydia called him back in. He arrived safely but “driving a box truck through two feet of snow is a scary thing,” he says. Jim’s wife, Sarah, has worked in O&G Accounts Receivable for 17 years. While she is still working, Jim has morphed into a house husband, something he admits with reservation. Shopping, cleaning, making the repairs that have been left unattended to – he’s actually enjoying it. “Tell everyone I have not forgotten what the days of the week are yet, but they don’t mean what they used to. Sunday isn’t the day before going back to work.” In April the couple took a trip to Washington, D.C. so Sarah could see the sites at cherry blossom time. “She has ample vacation time,” says Jim, “and now that’s all that I have.” Thank you, Jim, for being part of the O&G family.

The year was 1970 when **PAUL HORVAY** returned from his Army tour of duty in Viet Nam and found employment at O&G Industries. He worked alongside Ray Onegla as a laborer and stayed for about a year before moving along and beginning a career learning to repair large trucks. It was almost 40 years to the day when Paul returned to O&G in 2010, to spend his final working years as the shop foreman at the company’s Stamford garage. In between he mastered the maintenance of Fords, Sterlings, Mack, Kenworths – and Oshkosh trucks, common in the Stamford fleet and one reason why Jim Zambrero assigned him to oversee that location. Though his years with the company were relatively few, they were good ones. “I like helping people, I like figuring out technical problems for them,” he says, referring to his expertise diagnosing and repairing trucks and, lately, to administering the Stamford facility and keeping it operationally tuned up. Adjusting to the new retired life, he laughs: “I feel like I’m playing hooky.” Ruthann, his wife of 40 years, has “suggested” that Paul have dinners ready when she returns from work. Paul is faithfully complying with that request and other assorted domestic duties. He helps care for his daughter’s twins and responds to his other kids’ calls for Dad-help (Ruthann and Paul raised and launched three daughters and a son). “I really have no hobby at this point. Looking back, work was my hobby. I guess I don’t know what I want to be when I grow up. I do like car shows. Maybe I’ll get a muscle car to work on.” Not something already made perfect, he says, but a relic he can restore himself. The couple went to Hawaii in April for a 40th anniversary celebration but beyond that, with Ruthann working, the beat goes on. Thank you, Paul, for your contribution to keeping our fleet on the road!

**WES KNECHT** is one driver who is glad to be off the road. As he reckons it, he drove a truck for a contractor for 15 years before he came to O&G in June of 1990. Then he averaged 250 miles a day for the next 23 years driving out of Southbury, sharing the roads with “lots of crazy people.” Says Wes, tongue in cheek, “I don’t really even care to drive my own car!” In his last years with O&G he mainly drove a rock body truck, hauling boulders, demolition and waste from plants and quarries and the occasional job site. Before that he delivered materials from the Danbury Mason Yard to addresses across Westchester and Fairfield counties. “I enjoyed seeing the ‘monster houses’ being built down there.” He appreciates his years with O&G: work was close to his home, the pay was good, the people were good to work for and with. “I tried to get along with everybody. My philosophy is that getting along makes everyone’s job easier. Communication is a big thing with me. I like sharing with the guys what I know about certain deliveries if I’d been there and they hadn’t, things like that. It just makes life easier for everyone.” With his wife, Rebecca, Wes plans to visit Texas, Tennessee and Indiana where his son lives (who, a chip not far from the old block, drives a heavy duty wrecker). And now he has the time to get deeper into woodworking, a hobby he’s pursued for some time. “I’ve made scale model trucks, a jewelry chest, some furniture. It took me six months last year but I totally rebuilt my kitchen from the floor joists up.” His wooden trucks are masterworks, sometimes reaching five feet in length. The number of moving parts in some models approaches 100. This spring he’s starting a tow truck model that needs to be in Indiana in September for his son. Here’s to having someone drive YOU around for a change, Wes!
On the job they called **ORVILLE NICHOLSON** “Smiley.” With a positive outlook on life, no matter what the storms around him might be, Orville intentionally brought joy to the workplace. As he puts it, “I like to make everybody be my friend.” He was employed as a mason, working exclusively in concrete, mainly on bridges, for 19 years with O&G. In his rich Jamaican accent he jokes, “If I passed tomorrow and I’m in that box and I’m not smilin’, means I’m comin’ back for somebody ‘cause somebody ticked me off!” He learned his trade in his native Jamaica, came to the States 32 years ago (“Look at all the snow outside now—I be too long here, too long!”), and finally landed at O&G after working for numerous other contractors. “Oh, oh, I gotta say this,” he reports with enthusiasm. “I have so much gratitude for what O&G has done for me that I could reach retirement. They kept me working. Working for them was brilliant. And I lift my hat for Leo Nardi who was the greatest, the best I ever worked for.” At the end of October Orville retired but is anxious to come back to help Leo whenever he’s needed. One wonders how he could possible fit it into his busy retirement schedule. He does a few side jobs now, is a property manager of a three-family home for a neighbor, cares for two more of his own properties, shuttles his grandkids to and from school, and between activities, sings in the choir at St. John’s Episcopal in Bridgeport and is the church’s project manager, overseeing the upkeep of the building requires. “I shovel snow for three properties. I’ll be out from 11 in the morning to 8 at night. But I’ve got the strength. Age has nothing to do with it. It’s how you treat your body from the start.” He’s ready to squeeze in a vacation with his bride, Herlena; it will be their first true getaway in 19 years. Breathe easy, Orville, and keep smiling.

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**Rocky Hill High School**  
**Rocky Hill, CT**

Some 35 years after building it, O&G is returning to Rocky Hill High School to undertake extensive additions and renovations designed to meet the State of Connecticut’s renovate-as-new requirements. Construction is scheduled to begin this summer and will focus on sitework and new additions before the project transitions to renovation of the existing high school in 2015. The school will remain occupied throughout the project and be renovated in phases. Being a multi-story building, phasing is a very critical component. The 36-month-long contract is valued at $45M. The project architect is Mike Sorano of Friar Associates of Farmington. Currently in the preconstruction stage, Ken Biega is the Project Executive and Lorel Purcell is Preconstruction Manager. This will be the fifth project O&G has performed for the Town of Rocky Hill.

**Putnam High School**  
**Putnam, CT**

O&G has been engaged to manage construction at Putnam High School. This 32-month, $31M project for the Putnam Board of Education includes 87,000SF of renovate-as-new school construction, a 10,000SF gymnasium addition and another 7,000SF of office space. O&G has been collaborating with project architect Drummy Rosane Anderson to present value engineering choices to the school’s building committee in this closely budgeted project. The team’s ability to collaborate across specialties and control costs early in the design stages makes implementing changes simpler for the owner and less costly to the designers while maintaining the pre-construction schedule. Building will begin this July with the construction of portable classrooms, abatement of the auditorium wing and construction of temporary swing space. This multi-phase project will conclude in the spring of 2017. Ken Biega is O&G’s Project Executive, Lee Sullivan is Pre-Construction Manager and Dave Longo is Senior Project Estimator.

**Smith & Wesson Flagpole Restoration, Corporate Renovations**  
**Springfield, MA**

O&G was awarded a pair of projects for Smith & Wesson Corporation in Springfield, Massachusetts. In the first, the Veterans Memorial Flagpole near the company’s headquarters, toppled in a 2011 tornado, is being restored and updated. The highly publicized project will see the circa 1932 flagpole replaced with an aluminum version and set in a new masonry edifice with restored stonework and updated inscriptions that honor native sons who fought in conflicts after 1932. The project began in December and wrapped up in time for Memorial Day. In the second project, at the manufacturer’s headquarters, O&G renovated office space for human resources, benefits and payroll, upgraded its executive suites, and constructed a new employee fitness area with locker rooms, showers, training space and athletic equipment. Work began in November and was completed on schedule this February. John Humes, Project Manager Christina Oneglia-Rossi and Project Superintendent David Olsen of the Special Projects Group were responsible for both efforts.

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**FREDERICK M. DELEON, JR.**, better known to his coworkers at O&G as Rick, passed away on February 17 at the age of 70. For many years Rick was a respected and popular driver with the company. He is survived by his wife Sophie, his daughter Michele Lyons and sons Frederick II and Christopher. Chris is a driver for the company. Our condolences to the entire DeLeon family.
New Milford Hospital Emergency Department Renovations and Addition
New Milford, CT
This March the Building Division embarked on a $9M project to expand the New Milford Hospital’s Emergency Department. When completed in April of 2015, 12,500SF of new construction and 6,000SF of existing interior renovation will have provided 13 exam rooms, one critical care room, one triage room, a large central nursing station, a new entrance canopy and drop-off loop and a new ambulance vestibule that will provide private entrance into the department. A glass corridor will connect the new Emergency Department to the existing facility. Interior renovations will relocate the existing cafeteria, cardiac department and office space to accommodate the new project. The owner, Western New England Health Network, is represented by Charles Geyer and John Sterry. The project architect is the S/L/A/M Collaborative represented by Amy Samuelson and Daniel Renn. The O&G management team comprises Project Executive Brian Holmes, Project Manager Carrie Riera, Superintendent Mike Edwards and MEP Coordinator Andrew Demado.

Orville H. Platt High School Additions and Renovations
Meriden, CT
O&G is revamping Platt High School in an $111M, four-phase project that broke ground in October of 2013. Work chiefly consists of major abatement and demolition of the school’s aging academic, vo-tech and administration wings and the construction of new freshmen academy, upper classrooms, vo-tech and kitchen/cafeeteria wings. The portions of the school that will remain – auditorium, pool, athletic spaces and boiler room – will be completely renovated and meet Connecticut’s new high-performance building regulations. Temporary classrooms and other swing space will ensure that work does not interfere with regular school activities. Crews are currently constructing a two-story media center that is cantilevered 30 feet beyond the building footprint. Work is scheduled for completion in August of 2017. Antinozzi Associates is the project architect; the owner’s representative is Arcadis. Mark Jefko is the Project Executive, David Cravanzola is Project Manager, Steve Baranello is Project Superintendent and Megan Semenetz is Project Engineer.

Bowen Athletic Field Renovation
New Haven, CT
An aging athletic field, the home field of Hillhouse High School, will be significantly upgraded in a project estimated at $10M. Presently in the planning stages, the project calls for the demolition of several buildings and large grandstands and the construction of a multipurpose athletic field with artificial turf, an eight-lane running track with field event features and a natural turf practice area. Work also includes the installation of lighting for night events, a 2,000-seat grandstand with full press box, rehabilitation of the gatehouse, new restrooms, a locker room building, environmentally friendly green roofs on several structures, expanded pedestrian lighting and ornamental fencing and railings. Special consideration will be given to hazardous materials abatement during demolition and to working in proximity to wetlands. The S/L/A/M Collaborative is project architect; the City of New Haven is represented by Gilbane Building Company. Project Executive is Mark Jefko and Senior Estimator is David Longo for O&G.

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W ATER RECLAM ATION PLAN T SAV ES BIG FOR UCONN
Although common in western states where water is a scarce commodity, the Reclaimed Water Facility (RWF) at UConn is among the first of its kind in New England. Through a three-stage process of screening, microfiltration and UV disinfection, the RWF returns up to 500,000 gallons of otherwise effluent water to the Central Utilities Plant for use in electricity generation, air conditioning and heating. Reclaiming that many gallons gives the University a reliable way to take the strain off its supply of potable water. As the project’s general contractor, O&G’s Building Division self-performed the two-year, $17.5M contract.