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Executive of the Month: Wolf, president of Wolf Construction – Leads firm by building the next 100 years

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Gregory Wolf,
Wolf Construction

New York, NY Wolf Construction Corporation is one of New York City's youngest and most recognizable construction firms/family names in the industry. Gregory Wolf, a 4th generation owner and great grandson of Alexander Wolf leads the firm by building the next 100 years. The New York Real Estate Journal recently conducted a question and answer session with Wolf.

Q: How did you get started in the business?

A: Ironically, I started working part time as a laborer while I was still racing as a professional cyclist. I needed a change of scenery when the season was winding down and decided to try my hand at the family business. While working at the United Nations as a laborer, the superintendent quit (previous evening) and I was told that I had to finish the job. I distinctly remember calling Fred Spidalieri the morning that the lockers arrived asking why they didn't come pre-assembled. We worked day and night with 15 carpenters on the AW&S assembly line to complete that project on time.

Post cycling, I found my next love/passion and wanted to build. My grandfather was ecstatic as he always wanted me to take over the business and shine. My father always placed me on complicated projects and I worked my way up through the ranks. As an assistant super, I honed my skills, asked a lot of questions, and learned how to build. As a super, I built award-winning projects such as the Trinity School's Johnson Chapel (AIA Award Winner) and the Hispanic Society of America Museum among others. As a project executive, I managed all the Empire State Building work for eight years tackling some of their most challenging works.

Q: Tell us about Wolf Construction Corporation (WCC) and how that came to fruition.

A: I met with my father for dinner one evening and told him that I was not happy at the family firm and needed his advice. He had been retired since 2012 and things had changed quite a bit. I thought about working with another firm for about 20 seconds and then told him that I wanted to start up a new company bringing back the values that he, my grandfather, and great grandfather instilled in me. In April 2019, Wolf Construction Corp. was formed focusing on building the next 100 years.

Wolf at 2003 San Francisco Grand Prix.

Q: How do you think being a member of a construction family impacted you growing up?

A: I was never forced into the business. My father always stated that the opportunity was there, but you had to learn the business and all the different facets of the operation. Since I was a child, I was always interested in building and would go to job sites with my grandfather and other superintendents. When I was 10, I caught the bug for cycling and wanted to become a professional cyclist racing throughout the world. At 18, I was a member of the U.S. National team and competed throughout the world on multiple professional teams. Being based in Italy and France, I am now able to use those language skills when dealing with the trades and even specific vendors. The experiences as a top-level athlete gave me a different perspective on life and much stronger work ethic.

Q: Of all the roles you've played, what was your favorite?

A: Superintendent as I am a very strong builder. I can foresee issues before they present themselves and analyze things early on. In the field, I always lit up on a jobsite with enthusiasm and passion. We worked hard but would have a good time, which made the projects memorable. The ability to build has also enhanced my ability to promote our firm's message about building a quality project which is something that our clients note and appreciate.

Q: What are some of the most important lessons that you've learned from the people that came before you? Who were some of your role models?

A: My father was a guiding force in my career. He was one tough SOB but was fair. To this day, I still have sub-contractors telling me that my father's word was good as gold. He and my grandfather instilled in me that a punchlist was not acceptable and that you should always be striving for better. He had one of the sharpest eyes I have ever seen and would point things out all the time.

Pietro Scampini was also a major influence in my life and like a second father to me. Pietro took me in when I was a young cyclist and taught me the ways of the world. He was a famous Italian sculptor who would never mention his accolades and always stated that you treat everyone in the same fashion no matter who you are. His passion for life is something I live for every day and constantly strive for.

Hispanic Society of America Museum - New York, NY

Q: How does it feel to leave a company with so much history, and with so much of your family's history wrapped up into it?

A: For me, it was a relief to leave and start something new and fresh. I read an autobiography which John Tishman had written and realized that I was going through a lot of the same issues as he had growing through a family business. I hadn't been happy for years and things had changed quite a bit since 2012. Continuing the values, beliefs, and qualities, bestowed upon me by the past three generations was a critical part of launching the new company. It has been very exciting learning how to start a business from scratch.

Q: Of everything you've learned over the past 15 years, what do you find is the most important message?

A: Take pride in the work you perform, always strive for quality and perfection, and believe in the path you are taking. Success breeds success and you have to always keep your finger on the pulse.

Q: What response did you receive when you announced that you were leaving your old firm?

A: I knew there would be a lot of talk...but didn't expect 18,000 hits on LinkedIn (in three days) – so

that was considered a successful announcement. Quite a few clients were happy that I was bringing back the quality and care which once established the Wolf family name. My goal is to rebuild a tradition of employees feeling wanted and passing off their knowledge to the next generation of upcoming employees. For years, I would travel to jobsites with the son of a former employee of my grandfather and their love for the firm was first and foremost which built loyalty and trust.

Q: Cycling and Construction, two completely different spectrums?

A: Cycling taught me how to fight and persevere. Construction continued that but brought out the fire for building faster and better. Being an athlete is one thing...becoming a professional athlete is something which many don't accomplish. I have been lucky enough to travel the world and meet great people along the way. Contradictory to what a family member told me once, clients are your friends and fostering relationships is what helps you build higher!

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