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Charlie Albano, Alfonso Puccio and Sabino Grassi

Photography by Vincenzo D'Alto

The Power of Three

By Loretta N. Di Vita

The number three has always been regarded as a symbol of solidity, so “triad” – a connection of three people or things – is the perfect descriptor for Construction TRIAD-APG, a longstanding building development company comprising three associates.

Charlie Albano and Alfonso Puccio, operating principals, and Sabino Grassi, investing partner, are the keen businesspeople behind the name. Meeting the affable builders in their Saint-Laurent headquarters, we head downstairs to a basement-level conference room. Albano cracks an endearing inside joke, calling the office “the St. Leonard Duplex” – since the basement contains a kitchen.

Their enthusiasm is practically contagious while sharing a company brochure. Flipping the pages, the breadth and diversity of TRIAD’s expertise in predominantly turnkey industrial-commercial, institutional, and residential work, dating back to its 1988 inception, becomes obvious.

Among a long list of notable endeavours, there is the transformation of Les Trois Arches restaurant into a 73-unit condominium complex; the total facelift of an office tower flanking the Metropolitan highway; the \$1.8-million Merck Frost daycare centre; a monumental church; a sprawling industrial park. They’ve also built or renovated around 1,000 residential units, including an astonishing 35,000-square-foot mansion – one of the three biggest homes in Quebec – whose owner’s identity the builders have sworn to keep secret. Albano chuckles, “My kids thought I was building it for John Travolta.”

The partners buzz about TRIAD’s pet project, Ventura – a new lifestyle condo development that will “transform the landscape of Pointe-Claire” – but the conversation is more about humble beginnings, resilient partnerships, and the non-material rewards of well-played careers.

It was Grassi’s wife in an exercise of “good intuition” that spurred the genesis of the company. She suggested to her husband – already the owner of a real estate business – that he align himself with brother-in-law Puccio, a civil engineer and turnkey pioneer and longtime buddy Albano, who, though highly successful in a Chicago-based administrative role with a paper company, was sorely missing his hometown Montreal. The men met to discuss a partnership on December 27, 1987. Less than five months later, TRIAD was ready to roll.

The company’s first project was the building of a church community centre. Albano says he feels “blessed” to have had the opportunity. (If the pun is

intentional, he doesn’t let on.) Puccio laughs, “Every time we build a church, the priests say, ‘Give us a good price, and you’ll be ensured a place in heaven.’”

Nearly 30 years later, the snapshot is one of an accomplished team bonded by good chemistry and commonality. The three are of Italian origin; Grassi is Canadian-born, and, coincidentally, both Albano and Puccio hail from Ribera, Sicily. In that nudge-nudge kind of way, they tease each other about construction “being in their Italian blood.” Grassi’s father was (surprise!) a builder. He recalls laughingly, “I grew up on construction sites. We never had a sidewalk in front of our house.” Puccio’s dad was a construction labourer – “always the first on the job, and the last to leave.” And, what about Albano? Well, he is Italian after all.

It was paternal role modelling that sparked their own ambitions. They remember their fathers as the embodiments of a distinctly Italian new-immigrant work ethic. “I don’t know of any Italians who ever had trouble finding a job in the ‘50s and ‘60s, and that’s because they were known as responsible workers,” says Albano. Today, the partners navigate their business dealings with the same moral compass.

Should there be any question about the authenticity of the impossibly well-adjusted team, the three partners attest that things truly are as rosy as they appear. “We’re just lucky,” Grassi says, downplaying the need to check one’s ego at the door when working in a team. Albano continues about the dynamics of partnership: “Partners are never 100 percent equal, but the relationship must be balanced.” Then he adds with characteristic humour, “One year Alfonso gets the extra vacation day; the next year I get it.” Clearly, their success is the result of no-nonsense hard work combined with determination, and – let’s face it – brain muscle, but behind the cloak of enterprising zeal, there’s ‘heart’. “Even during the ‘90s recession, we kept employees on as long as we could, because the thought of them not providing for their families was too much of a psychological burden to bear,” says Albano.

In true ‘snatch the pebble from the master’ form, Puccio’s son, a civil engineer, is presumptive successor; Grassi’s son, also in civil engineering, is slotted to come onboard; and Albano’s daughter oversees Ventura’s marketing and sales.

As for legacy, they’re proud of how they’ve enhanced the spirit of many areas, leaving behind integral community-oriented buildings. Puccio sums it up nicely, recounting how his granddaughter would point to her daycare centre, joyously announcing to anyone in earshot: “My Nonno built that!”