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Company of the Month: Connolly Brothers, Inc. - A history of construction excellence and resilience

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Connolly Brothers founding members Gregory, Thomas, Michael, and Stephen circa 1904.

Beverly, MA At approximately the time that the world started hearing about an invention called the telephone, Connolly Brothers was founded in 1880 by brothers Steve and Greg Connolly of Beverly, Mass. Early projects included road work, shipping gravel to North Station for the completion of Boston's gateway to the north, a residential project for Ernest Longfellow (son of the famous poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow), and work for the Eastern Yacht Club in Marblehead, Mass.

Following World War I, Greg Connolly, son of the founder, returned home a war hero with a Purple Heart and a Silver Star, and he formally incorporated the construction company on January 5, 1928. Among its many projects throughout that decade, the Connolly team worked on approximately 80 projects throughout the eastern U.S. with renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead.

As was the case with most businesses, the advent of the Great Depression provided a significant challenge. Throughout the Depression, Greg Connolly worked tirelessly to keep the company afloat, and to keep local workers employed. While the finish line was unclear, he was driven to make sure that the company survived until brighter days might unfold for his sons, Stephen III and Peter Connolly. Greg was successful in his mission, and when both of his sons returned from the service following World War II, Connolly was heavily involved in numerous public construction projects, including police and fire stations, public schools, and post office buildings.

The work ethic that drove Greg to keep the company alive during lean times clearly spread to his children. The day after Stephen Connolly IV returned from service in the Navy in 1971, his father, Stephen Connolly III, woke him up at 6:30 in the morning to tell him, "Get up! It's time to get to work."

Stephen Connolly operates a shovel dozer at Beverly Hospital for a groundbreaking ceremony while the nurses look on circa 1938.

Many changes have taken place at Connolly since that time. After taking up the reigns of leadership in 1988, Stephen Connolly IV moved the firm's offices from its original location, 20 Oak St. in Beverly, to 152 Conant St. More significantly, he took the company in a bold new direction, transferring away from a general contractor to a construction manager while also migrating Connolly from residential work to private commercial, industrial, and institutional projects. Over the next 40 years, Connolly served an impressive cadre of corporate clients, managing the construction of, among other things, dozens of automotive dealerships and headquarters or facilities for numerous manufacturing, retail, and tech companies.

The firm became an early adopter of the design-build construction model. For general readers, the now-popular design-build approach provides a "one-stop-shop," offering clients a single point of contact and responsibility on projects from conception through to completion with designers, engineers, architects, and builders under one organizational roof.

Despite all these changes, however, some things have remained constant. After 140 years, Connolly Brothers is still a thriving family-owned and -run business serving the New England region. In addition, some of the firm's oldest clients have remained loyal customers across generations. One such example is the Eastern Yacht Club. More than 100 years after Connolly's initial work for the club, Connolly returned in 2014 to turn what might have been a tragedy into a triumph: following a devastating fire, Connolly rebuilt the Eastern Yacht Club such that its facilities emerged better than ever without losing their historic appeal.

Perhaps most importantly, the work ethic that saw Connolly Brothers through the Great Depression continues to run strong to this day, as Stephen Connolly IV passed the leadership torch to his son, Connolly Brothers president Jay Connolly, in 2019, along with his son-in-law, Connolly Brothers vice president for real estate and development Thaddeus Minshall.

Minshall is a 10-year veteran of commercial real estate development in Washington, D.C. and Jay Connolly has been working in the family business since 2007.

Among the fifth generation's first completed projects are new corporate headquarters for companies such as KROHNE, Harmonic Dr., and HighRes Biosolutions, as well as the Great Marsh Brewing Company's idyllic home on the causeway in Essex, Mass., one of many challenging marine and shoreline projects Connolly has completed over the years.

Now well into its second century of operation, those Connolly Brothers values include a commitment to integrity and a clear, simple goal: delivering an unparalleled client experience and work of such high quality that the firm is asked back for the client's next project—even if that project may not surface until a future Connolly generation can complete it.