

COLLABORATION, COOPERATION, AND A CONSTRUCTION MANAGER

Stephen Varone, *President of RAND Engineering & Architecture, DPC*



THE PROBLEM. We were the project engineer/architect for a large capital improvement project at Nordeck Apartments, a six-building, 343-unit complex near the Atlantic Ocean in Arverne, Queens, that was heavily damaged by Hurricane Sandy. It was a \$50 million project with a very wide-ranging scope of work – replacing bricks, windows, parapets, and roofs, an electrical upgrade, new boiler rooms, renovating interiors, and bringing apartments up to the standards of the Americans With Disabilities Act. We also did a lot of work on the grounds around the buildings. It was an enormous project with many moving parts and many different players. At its height, there were more than 100 workers on the site at one time, from many different disciplines.

The storm had flooded Nordeck's crawl spaces and

single heating plant, catastrophically knocking out heat, hot water, and electricity to the entire complex. To prevent this from happening again, the decision was made to construct a new boiler room in each building. One of our challenges was constructing boiler rooms in buildings that were never meant to house a boiler room, all the while keeping the new equipment above the flood elevation. This was further complicated when the Department of Buildings, which originally approved sidewall-venting, changed its mind after the installation was complete, requiring vertical flues for both the boiler and hot-water heaters at each building, resulting in a large change order.

THE EPIPHANY. Capital improvement projects demand

a lot of time, energy, and focus from all involved. You really have to have the right players working together, and on a project of this size, keeping everything coordinated is no easy feat. When you have six different projects occurring at a six-building complex, it's unrealistic to expect your property manager, contractor, or engineer/architect to manage it all. That's when you need a construction manager to oversee the project – to coordinate meetings, gain approvals, relay information to the owners/board and managers, ensuring they are happy, and maintain the project schedule and cost – basically making sure all the trains run on time. Nordeck's property manager is FirstService Residential, and fortunately, they have an effective construction manager arm, which made everyone's job so much easier.

THE EXECUTION. As the architectural/engineering team, we were actively involved from scope development and design through construction administration. An important part of our job was to foster open communication between all parties, and to ensure that all understood the thinking and reasoning behind the design. Meeting regularly to thoroughly discuss the intricacies of the project, keeping everyone in the loop, and communicating candidly kept things running smoothly, especially when we came up against challenges such as the unexpected change order.

THE RESULT. This project is just about complete – the storm damage has been repaired, each building upgraded and its resiliency strengthened. It's been very successful, considering all that had to happen. On any project, regardless of its size and scope, you're going to have challenges and frustrations, but Nordeck's capital improvement program is a great example of how open communication, collaboration, and cooperation are vital for a successful project and the key to weathering any storm that may come. ■



AFTER



BEFORE