

A Roofing Company with a Special Touch



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALLEN BROTHERS, INC.

Allen Brothers Tackles Specialty Projects Throughout the Region

By Mary E. Kremposky, Associate Editor

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llen Brothers, Inc. has helped recreate a small piece of home for Catholic immigrants from the Balkans. The Rochester Hills-based roofing company employed its expertise in specialty roofing systems to install an imported Spanish clay tile roof on St. Paul's Albanian Church, also in Rochester Hills. A common feature of village churches throughout southeastern Europe, the clay tile roof brings a touch of the Old World to the middle of northern Oakland County. Using a combination of Old and New World application techniques, Allen Brothers installed this beautiful roof that provides a glimpse of home for its roughly 1,000 parishioners.

A TASTE OF HOME

A roof is seldom the star of a building. But at St. Paul's Church on Auburn Road near M-59, parishioners poured their energy into the creation of a clay tile roof that would bring to life the appearance and spirit of churches in their homeland. "The building was designed around the image created by the clay tile roof," said Robert Allen, president of Allen Brothers, Inc., a roofing and sheet metal company with a long list of signature roofs to its credit, including Birmingham's Townsend Hotel, custom sheet metal work at the emerging YMCA in Auburn Hills, and a future project restoring a slate roof for an historic building at Cranbrook.

The parish imported actual clay tiles from Italy to satisfy their quest for a

building true to the appearance of their beloved native churches. The imported terra cotta tiles are slightly thicker and different in hue than American-made Spanish clay tile, said Allen, who owns and operates the 17-year-old roofing company with his brother, Gary Allen. "Soil conditions in Italy produce a lighter terra cotta tile with a softer almost yellow-orange cast vs. the American clay that has a darker orange and even reddish cast," he said.

The need for authenticity brought its own set of challenges. The imported tiles, officially called Florentine terra cotta, differ markedly in design and application. Nailed directly to the roofing surface, American-made tile arrives on the jobsite with a predrilled hole for the nail. The imported tile arrived with



Tiles imported from Italy added to the authenticity of this Old World church built in northern Oakland County.

no such amenity. The 10-by-16-inch Old World tiles are designed to hook onto battens - strips of wood laid horizontally across the roof at 16-inch intervals - and to set on the row of tiles directly below. In this system, the hooked design and the cumulative weight of all the tiles holds the roof in place without the use of nails, said Allen.

"The batten method is a much older method," said Allen, "but we just didn't feel comfortable with using the board and batten method alone."

Allen used the best of both worlds, fusing the application techniques of the Old and New Worlds to create a stable and secure roof. The roof assembly, moving from the church interior to the clay tile, has a wood roof deck that serves as the interior ceiling, followed by a rigid nail-based insulation with a plywood laminate directly above the deck, a waterproofing membrane, and finally the batten board and clay tile. Allen Brothers installed batten board on the roof assembly, hung the tiles in the tradition of Old World craftsmen, and fastened each individual tile in place with a nail, as well. "We know this roof is not going to blow off," said Allen.

Parish volunteers were even inspired to put a little sweat equity into construction of their new house of worship. Drilling tile for God, volunteers spent several Saturday afternoons drilling nail holes in roughly 45,000 individual tiles with high-speed drills outfitted with diamond-tipped carbide bits. "There were dozens of volunteers out on the church lawn facing Auburn Road drilling holes in the tiles," said Allen.



Portions of this intricate roof are both radiused and hipped.

"They did it in several phases. As they saw us using the tile, they would drill more."

Devising the installation method for the imported clay tile roof was only half the battle. The entire roof has a steep, 12:12 pitch and is "cut up," meaning the roof contains difficult angles as well as portions that are both radiused and hipped. "I would say half of the roof was cut up, while the other half offered easy stretches of open roof surface," said Allen.

Clay tile also clads the steep 23:12 pitch peaks of two imposing bell towers that flank the main entrance and complete the image of an Old World church. With bottom eaves 60 feet above grade and tower peaks 20 feet higher or 80 feet above grade, the towers were just within reach of the 80-foot man lifts that hoisted crew and materials to the rooftop. "We also partially scaffolded the bell towers," Allen added.

THE ART OF CAMOUFLAGE

In configuration and façade, architect Brown-Teefey's design complemented this visually striking clay tile roof. Mirroring the village churches of southeastern Europe, the building skin is an assembly of rough split-faced concrete block with limestone accents over the arches and window surrounds. "The split-faced block gives the building a rustic look that resembles actual

stone," said Allen.

Bloomfield Hills-based Brown-Teefey & Associates Architects, P.C. artfully placed the clay tile roofing on the main body of the church and along the exposed face of the mansard-like ridges outlining the perimeter of the adjacent parish center. An EPDM flat roof and the complex's mechanical equipment are cleverly hidden behind the ridges running the length of the center. "In fact, the central flat roof is almost sunken behind the ridges of the clay tile roof," said Allen.

At the job's peak, Allen Brothers had a crew of twenty workers installing both the flat and the clay tile roof. The entire project spanned roughly 12 months, beginning in late October 2001 and reaching completion in August 2002.

Built by The Bell Company of Fraser, the entire church complex actually has three different roofing systems: the 20,000-square-foot, fully adhered EPDM flat roof; the 45,000 pieces of clay tile cladding the church proper, the bell towers and miscellaneous sections; and a 13,000-square-foot gymnasium roof clad in asphalt or dimensional architectural shingles. The parish center separates gymnasium and church, permitting the less expensive asphalt shingles to blanket the gym roof without detracting from the clay tile roofing, added Allen.

The church may clad the gymnasium in clay tile in the future, said Allen. A durable choice, clay tile roofs usually last 80 to 100 years, far outstripping the lifespan of other roofing systems. "The most one will get out of the shingle roof on the gymnasium is 20 years," said Allen. "The parish will in theory have replaced that gymnasium roof five times by the time they replace the clay tile roof once."

Thanks to the skill of Allen Brothers, Inc., St. Paul's beautiful expanse of clay tile roof is a feast for the eyes for both parishioners and members of the surrounding community. A roof is sometimes the forgotten stepchild of a building, a functional but nondescript layer of materials. In business since 1986, Allen Brothers has transformed a basic trade into a specialty craft. Handling jobs far beyond the average roof, Allen Brothers has a long history of executing projects that require an uncommon level of engagement and expertise. The roof restoration of the Village Club in Bloomfield Hills and national recognition for their volunteer efforts in reroofing the damaged slate roof of the Pentagon are two projects that show the company's true colors.

THE VILLAGE CLUB

Allen Brothers restored an 80- to 100-year-old clay tile roof that graces the Village Club, a private, exclusive club for women. The roof is blanketed in flat clay tile as opposed to barreled or Spanish clay tile. A local clay tile manufacturer shaped, dried and oven-fired the tiles near the beginning of the twentieth century, said Allen.

The old clay tile roof was sprouting multiple leaks as the facility entered the twenty-first century. The source of failure was not the clay tiles but the roof underlayment. Allen Brothers carefully removed and stacked the clay tiles and repaired the underlayment and sections of the roof framing. "A great deal of carpentry work was involved," said Allen. "Some of the actual framing of the roof had deteriorated."

After repair of the roof framing, Allen Brothers replaced the underlayment and installed an ice and water shield on all of the eaves and angle changes in the



Tile installation was a blend of Old and New World techniques.

roof. "We then used a heavy 43-lb. base sheet on the rest of the roof before we reroofed the facility with the tiles and replaced all of the copper flashings," explained Allen.

Allen Brothers was able to reuse roughly 75 percent of the original tile. "Some of the tile had been damaged over the years or simply wore out," said Allen. "The challenge was to find tile that matched, which we did. We went to work and sought out reclaimed clay tiles from different vendors around the country."

The 4,000-square-foot roof was replaced in sections. In this way, damaged clay tiles in the section of roof currently under renovation were replaced with original tiles from other sections of the roof. The end result: the original clay tiles were grouped together, while the new replacement tiles were placed in a cluster in the back of the roof hidden from view. "We kept ahead of ourselves," said Allen. "We coordinated the job so that we used virtually all the new tile that we had gathered from around the country in the last section of the roof."

A key challenge was reroofing the project while the club maintained its list of charitable and social activities. "Also, we had to be very careful about making sure that we did no damage to the immaculate interior finishes," Allen added. The job consumed a month-and-a-half and was completed in late

October.

Allen Brothers will be embarking on another historical restoration project - the restoration of a slate roof for the Cranbrook Educational Community in Bloomfield Hills. The company's own history extends back to the late 1940s. The firm began as an offshoot of Allen Roofing, a company begun in 1946 by Don Allen, the father of the two Allen brothers who has served as past president and advisor to the current company.

Allen Brothers has evolved over the years into a company that specializes in high-end jobs in both the residential and commercial arena. Past projects include Oakland Hills Country Club and the Bloomfield Hills City Hall. The firm continues to grow and evolve as it approaches its twentieth year of operation. To better serve clients, the Allen brothers recently restructured their company into five departments: the flat department, steep specialty department, residential steep department, residential repair department, and the commercial maintenance and repair department. Each department has its own department head and staff.

"I felt that to be successful in this industry, you have to be multi-faceted," said Allen. "We literally approach every end of this business through our individual departments." Allen Brothers is able to facilitate all of these individual departments, help service its clients



Twin bell towers and the clay tile roof conjure up images of churches in the parishioners' Albanian homeland.

more efficiently, and accommodate present and future growth because of its recently completed, brand new 12,000-square-foot office, warehouse and sheet metal fabrication facility on Leach Road in Rochester Hills.

But after nearly two decades in business, Allen is especially proud of the company's ability to retain long-term employees. "We have employees who were with us right from the beginning," said Allen. "That has been the key to our success. We have been able to retain very talented and very loyal staff, both in the office and in the field."

Two of Allen Brothers' valued employees volunteered to join the National Roofing Contractor Association's Pentagon Project, an endeavor that gathered the resources and labor of NRCA members across the country to reroof the damaged portion of the Pentagon gratis. In a time of national shock and crisis, Allen Brothers donated the labor of Ken Kirby and Max Howard who journeyed to Washington, D.C. to aid the rebuilding effort.


As the selected runner-up for the project's Most Valuable Player Award, Allen Brothers earned national recognition for its participation in the Pentagon Project. An Allen Brothers employee since 1998, Kirby is considered a master metal craftsman, and Howard, with the company since 1986, is one of the most highly regarded roofers in this specialty company. About 40,000 square feet of the Pentagon's slate roof system was damaged beyond repair. The new roof has a Grace Ice and Water Shield, wood

sheathing, a 30-pound felt underlayment, new slate, and substantial amount of sheet copper and terne-coated stainless steel.


Through their volunteer effort, Allen Brothers has improved the state-of-the-country with their state-of-the-art skills

honed over the course of two generations and nearly five decades of specialty roofing applications. As the firm continues to grow, the future is definitely looking up for this diversified and evolving roofing and sheet metal company.







St. Paul's Albanian Catholic Community



Baxter U.S. Immunopharmaceutical Complex




Townsend Hotel



Onyx Ice Arena

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