

Business



Kingswood master wood worker Barry Casement works with a replacement peice as he works to restore doors from St. Patrick Cathedral in New York at their workshop in Buffalo Tuesday, April 29, 2014. (Mark Mulville/Buffalo News)

Ontario company wins cathedral restoration work through Buffalo shop

St. Patrick's Cathedral doors being restored at Buffalo shop of Ontario company in project at famous Manhattan landmark

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Published: May 21, 2014, 12:01 AM

Updated: May 20, 2014, 08:15 PM

In a nondescript industrial building in the Lovejoy section of Buffalo, four white oak doors that date to the 1870s, and weigh 1,200 pounds each, lay flat on waist-level tables.

The ornate transept doors normally stand in the entrances to the north and south sides of St. Patrick's Cathedral, perhaps the most famous Catholic church in the country, and a small company based in Ontario is entrusted with returning the doors to their original glory.

The work is a small part of a \$175 million restoration now underway at the Manhattan cathedral.

Three craftsmen in Kingswood Historic's Buffalo shop are examining the four doors for deterioration, adding structural supports and patching them with reclaimed, century-old wood.

"It's amazing to think who walked through these doors over time," said Randy Cheynowski, Kingswood's co-owner and president.

The St. Patrick's doors are just one of several projects that [Kingswood \(http://www.kingswoodhistoric.com/\)](http://www.kingswoodhistoric.com/) has worked on in this country since opening the East Lovejoy Street operation in 2011, with assistance from the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise business recruitment agency.

The company, which makes and restores wooden doors and windows, opened the shop in Buffalo to better position themselves to win more work in New York City and other American markets, as historic preservation gains favor among developers and architects.

“Now there’s been a resurgence in realizing the importance of it, and taking a restorative approach where possible,” said Randy’s brother and co-owner, Al, the vice president.

The brothers founded Kingswood, based in Wainfleet, Ont., eight years ago. Al Cheynowski’s background is in windows while Randy previously worked in construction. They have six employees in Ontario.

Seeking to qualify as a U.S.-based company for an \$800,000 restoration project at the historic [Corbin Building](http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/02/spared-the-wreckers-an-ornate-1889-building-gets-a-second-life-downtown/) (<http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/02/spared-the-wreckers-an-ornate-1889-building-gets-a-second-life-downtown/>) in New York City, the brothers worked with the BNE three years ago to find space in the Buffalo area, which would allow them to travel easily between the two shops.

The company ended up investing \$250,000 in machinery and equipment at the shop. The brothers originally envisioned hiring six workers but instead employ three in Buffalo.

Kingswood worked on the windows on the Corbin Building, in Lower Manhattan, while another local company, Boston Valley Terra Cotta, fabricated new terra cotta for the 1889 structure.

Four miles north of the Corbin, the landmark 130-year-old St. Patrick’s Cathedral in midtown Manhattan is being restored in several stages.

“We’re talking about the very survival of our beloved cathedral,” Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, Archbishop of New York, said in March 2012 in announcing the [renovations](http://www.saintpatrickscathedral.org/about_restore.php) (http://www.saintpatrickscathedral.org/about_restore.php).

The four transept doors – about 14 feet tall, 6½ feet wide and 6 inches thick – stand in pairs at the cathedral entrances along East 50th and East 51st streets. The doors at the church’s main Fifth Avenue entrance are bronze and were restored by another subcontractor.

Originally, the plan was to perform simple aesthetic refinishing on the wooden doors.

But Al Cheynowski said experts found the doors were showing signs of deterioration and would need more extensive restorations. Kingswood Historic was brought in on a \$95,000 contract, working under the general contractor, Structure Tone.

A Kingswood team went down to Manhattan in December and watched the removal of the doors and their loading onto a truck, which required the temporary closing of the street and a police presence. “It had to be done at night. We started at midnight,” Al Cheynowski said, noting that the same rigging company handles the Rockefeller Center Christmas tree.

The doors were moved into the Kingswood shop by forklift and thoroughly examined and prepared for restoration, which began in February. That work should be finished by next week, Al Cheynowski said, and the doors should be returned to New York City in early June.

A key part of the work on the doors is making structural improvements that will strengthen them and ensure their longterm survival, though much of that stabilization work isn’t visible.

Kingswood’s craftsmen are seeking to preserve as much of the original wood in the doors as possible.

“For the age of them, they’re in amazing, good condition. They were very well built,” Al Cheynowski said.

The other main component of the restoration work is identifying exterior parts of the doors that have rotted or worn away – or where a hinge or handle has been removed – and patching those with pieces of white oak wood reclaimed from century-old barns and other structures.

That wood is selected and cut to ensure the grain and patina match the original door, and once Kingswood finishes its part and another subcontractor stains the wood it should be difficult to tell where the patching was done. “It’s called a dutchman patch,” said Barrie Casement, a master woodworker.

The small company hopes to win more business in Western New York and the United States, including restoration work on the windows of the towering Richardson Olmsted Complex. They would like to eventually double the number of employees in Buffalo, to six.

Kingswood recently finished restoring the windows on the residence of the Swedish ambassador to the United Nations, and a double-decker bus tour through Manhattan not too long ago left Al Cheynowski with a feeling of pride.

“All through New York, you can see our work,” he said.

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