

Steven Plate: Stepping Up to the Task at the World Trade Center

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Workers got to the finish line early for 80% of the "Reflecting Absence" plaza of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, just in time for the 10th anniversary of the 2001 terrorist attacks. The accelerated deadline for the heart and soul of the estimated \$19-billion World Trade Center redevelopment in Lower Manhattan had upended work on major projects around and under the eight-acre green roof of the WTC's basement.

The early opening was quite an achievement. It would not have happened without the dedication of thousands of people involved in the 16-acre WTC rebuild. But the consensus is that Steven Plate is the person who made it possible.



Plate is deputy chief of capital planning and director of WTC construction for the WTC's landowner, the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey. The port authority is building the new WTC infrastructure, coordinating all WTC projects and developing four of them. This includes the estimated \$3.4-billion WTC Transportation Hub, the underground vehicle security center and the future-tallest building in the Western Hemisphere: the 1,776-ft One WTC.

PLATE

Stewardship of all the work falls to Plate. "He has the most difficult project probably in the world," says Anthony J. Sartor, chairman of Paulus, Sokolowski & Sartor, Warren, N.J., and a port authority commissioner. "It's incredible what he has been able to accomplish."

Considered smart, hands on and demanding, Plate is respected for creating a climate of cooperation among historically fierce competitors and for keeping the peace in a giant pressure cooker. "Some of the contractors may not like him at times, but they respect him," says Sartor.

Plate, who is always on call and took no vacation last year, is motivated by history. "Remembering the souls lost keeps our compass true north. We are just ordinary people doing extraordinary things in tribute. We never waiver," says Plate. He is reminded daily of those killed on 9/11 by his desk blotter, which has photos of the 84 port authority staffers who died.

"I've never seen anyone so dedicated to a project," says Michael J. Mennella, executive vice president of Tishman Construction Corp., an AECOM Co. The local firm has several WTC projects.

In 2010, the management maestro for the world's most emotionally charged, security-conscious and high-profile project had his plate piled high enough. There were turf battles and who-has-access-first issues among the myriad building teams at the congested site. Things were especially sensitive in the world's most complex multilevel basement, where everyone is in each other's hair.

Things got even more tangled when New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg—chairman of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum Foundation—decided to open the plaza by Sept. 11, 2011. Plate took up the challenge and got everyone to focus on the plaza push, which upended several other projects.

That coup is history, and Plate has no time to rest on his laurels. He's still pushing forward, despite recent snags beyond his control. Due to money issues, one snag is a slowdown in museum work that is delaying its targeted September 2012 opening. Another hiccup is a delay in the March topping out of One WTC steel. "We anticipate top-out in the spring but can't give a firm date," says a port authority spokesman, who points to bad weather as a main cause of the delay.

There will likely be other WTC crises, but that doesn't dampen spirits. "It's an amazing job that's been done, and Steve Plate is the leader of it," says Dominick Servedio, executive chairman of the local STV Inc., which has several WTC roles. "Managing any one project is difficult but taking on them all is Herculean."