BY SERVICE AND STONE

Codori family creates memorials, monuments that celebrate life



Jim Codori prepares a memorial with a stencil before sandblasting.



(above) A sample of the company's work. (opposite page) The Indiana state monument at the Gettysburg National Military Park was the first memorial Codori created and installed on the battlefield.

Jim Codori leans over a piece of granite and attaches a rubber stencil onto the stone's polished surface. Using an instrument that resembles a sand blaster, he carefully and methodically carves away the polish. His carving will ultimately become a three-dimensional rose with petals that will embellish a memorial stone his family business, Codori Memorials, has created for a customer.

To say that Codori Memorials is a family business is quite the understatement. Jim and his wife, Doris, have five children, 16 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. Joining Jim and Doris in business operations are their son, Chris Codori; son-in-law, Rick Robison; and grandson, Cory. Together, these individuals handle all aspects of design, construction and installation of monuments and memorials. Codori Memorials has been a fixture in Gettysburg for more than 40 years, according to Jim.

But in that span of decades, one element that has distinguished Codori Memorials from other dealers is the level of work Jim and his team devote to each project.

"Customers of ours know that we're going to put every bit of effort and work into each one we do," Jim says.

"We're one of the few monument dealers that still do our own work," says Chris. "The bulk of the monument dealers will sell to a family out of a book. They'll send that information to a quarry, which can many times be several hundred miles away. And they'll have the work done remotely there. It can be three or four months before you have the stone."

At Codori Memorials, all lettering and carving is completed at the Gettysburg shop at 400 W. Middle St. Chris notes that a Codori memorial can be completed, on average, in about three to five weeks.

Monument making over the years

Jim Codori has watched the memorial business grow from its humble beginnings in Gettysburg. He purchased the Gettysburg property from Bill Musser, owner of Gettysburg Building Supply, in 1964. In recent years, computer-aided design and the opening of a sales office in Hanover have expanded the scope and reach of Codori Memorials, thanks to the efforts of Chris Codori.

Before joining his parents in the business, Chris spent 10 years working as a paramedic at Gettysburg Hospital. At 43, he is Jim and Doris' youngest son and the graphic designer in the family. Chris uses the technology to create memorial designs personalized from customer to customer, and he emphasizes that the customer's desires are paramount when creating a memorial to a loved one.



BY MICHAEL VYSKOCIL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANASTASIA TANTAROS



(left to right) Rick Robison, Cory Robison, Chris Codori, Jim Codori, Doris Codori

"I tell people that I'm a tool that you use to accomplish what you, in your family, want to accomplish. Use me that way," Chris says. "I can tell you what's available and put it on the screen for you to look at, but at the end of the day, only you and your family know what's going to work."

Color, size and shape are three key elements that go into monument selection, Chris says. Codori acquires the stone from American and international quarries. The standard gray granite is quarried in Barre, Vermont. Over the years, black granite has become another popular selection, and it is quarried in India. Other colors include mountain rose, mahogany, Salisbury pink and Bahama blue, quarried in Africa.

Chris emphasizes that families are free to put whatever carved designs and lettering they desire on the front of the stone, since Codori does not charge by number of letters or number of designs added to the face of the stone.

Once the customer has selected a stone and approved the design, the computer system creates a rubber stencil based on the design. That stencil is applied to the face of the stone. Next, Jim carves the three-dimensional designs, and his son-in-law Rick Robison carves the lettering that identifies the individual memorialized.

These three-dimensional carvings are a unique hallmark of Codori's signature style. "Either because of time, lack of expertise or skill, a lot of the monument dealers, even the quarries, don't do shaped carvings. They do flat carvings with flat leaves and flat petals. We don't do any flat carvings," notes Chris.

Jim says that he developed the skill necessary for carving three-dimensional objects into stone by learning from other experienced monument carvers and practice over the years. Recently, he has begun teaching the art of shaped carving to Rick in an effort to preserve this time-tested technique.

Additional carving work, such as fine etchings that create elaborate scenes on the stone, are handled by Lancaster-based artist Lisa Fisher. Using a device similar to the type used to etch identifying markers onto objects, she guides the tool across the polished surface of a piece of granite, literally "drawing" the design onto the face of the stone.

Lisa has been traveling to Gettysburg for 12 years to work with Codori Memorials. "The Codoris are like family to me," she says. "I love to do these carvings. I like leaving a lasting impression on the families through the work I do for them."

Once the design has been etched, the stone is transferred to the memorial location or cemetery. Decades ago, men used to dig the stone's foundation by hand and cart the heavy stone to their determined location by hand using rollers. Today, backhoes dig the foundation footers and cranes guide the heavy stone blocks—which often weigh more than 900 pounds—into position.

In addition to granite memorial markers and cemetery headstones, engraved granite pavers and memorial plaques are among some of the most requested items Codori Memorials receives from families, colleges, and civic and nonprofit organizations.

Memorials in granite and bronze

At Gettysburg National Military Park, monuments and memorials to both Union and Confederate forces are scattered throughout the 6,000-acre battlefield. And the work of Codori Memorials is present in the park.

Several regimental monuments, state memorials to Delaware, Indiana and Maryland and the Gen. Longstreet Memorial were all created by Codori Memorials. The Indiana state monument was Codori's first memorial placed on the battlefield, installed near Spangler Spring in 1971. A photo album at Codori's Gettysburg office reveals the process undertaken to install the Indiana monument at the park.

But the work of Codori Memorials doesn't stop with Gettysburg. The Codoris have been fortunate to work on high-profile sculpture projects outside Adams County. Bronze sculptures designed and installed by Codori Memorials include:

- a 6-foot-high bronze wall mounted statue of Pope John Paul II flanked by two students, installed at Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Maryland;
- the Irish Brigade monument at Antietam National Battlefield in Antietam, Maryland;
- the John Philip Sousa statue at the U.S. Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C.;
- a monument at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, New York; and
- the Vermont National Guard Fallen Heroes Memorial for the Vermont National Guard stationed at Colchester, Vermont.

Because of the size and costs involved with these bronze sculptures, Codori Memorials only crafts about one to two per year. Currently, the family is working with Philadelphia-based sculptor Terry Jones on The Scottish Memorial Monument, a memorial in tribute to Scottish immigrants, for The St. Andrew's

Society in Philadelphia. Jones, a member of the society, has also designed several sculptures at Gettysburg National Military Park.

"We've been very fortunate in dealing with several renowned sculptors," says Jim. "They call us and ask us to design the granite under their proposed monuments, which we do for them. We take it, from beginning to end, all the foundation work, and all they have to concern themselves with is the bronze sculptures."

He observes, "These types of projects go above and beyond what we normally do."

Services of solace and comfort

For the Codori family, there is no escaping the reality that customers seek their services when creating memorials for deceased loved ones. Over the decades, Codori Memorials has created countless headstones and gravesite markers. But no matter how large or small, each one received the Codori touch.

Harold and Barbara Small of Gettysburg have known the Codori family for years. The Smalls sought the services of Codori Memorials after the death of their 9 ½-year-old granddaughter, Brandi. "We were devastated at the loss of her, and Jim and Doris cried along with us as we told them stories of what she meant to us," says Harold.

"They helped us design a scene where she is etched into the stone, surrounded by her favorite possessions," he says. "They even included Brandi's cursive signature and some of her original artwork in the scene, because we were so proud of what a talented little artist she was. It's all there on her stone so that when [we] visit her grave nearly every day, we feel like we are truly having a visit with her."

And for Jim Codori, this type of response is something that he says gives him a great deal of personal satisfaction. "I feel that through this type of work, if I have been able to give solace and comfort to people, then I've done my job."



A mausoleum created in 1980 by Codori Memorials, located in Gettysburg's Evergreen Cemetery.

The Codori family in Gettysburg

Jim Codori, owner of Codori Memorials, is a fifth-generation resident of Gettysburg. Jim can trace his family lineage in Adams County back to 1828, when his great-great-great-grandfather, Nicholas, arrived in Gettysburg with his brother, Jean.

Nicholas married an Adams County native, Elizabeth Martin, in 1835. The couple lived in the home located at 44 York St. in Gettysburg. Nicholas operated a profitable slaughterhouse behind the York Street property. In 1854, Nicholas purchased a 273-acre farm along the Emmitsburg Road in Cumberland Township that would carry the Codori name.

Although Nicholas never lived on the property, he rented the farm to tenant farmers. During the Battle of Gettysburg, the Codori farm was directly in the path of the Confederate assault on July 3, 1863. It is not clear who occupied the farm at the time of the battle. The two-story frame house on the property dates to the mid-1800s. The iconic Codori barn that exists today is not the original barn; the original was torn down in the late 1880s.

Nicholas' great-great-grandson, Richard Codori, continued the tradition of operating a Codori York Street business. Richard operated Codori Inc., which included a gasoline station and lumber supply company. Richard also handled sales for a monumert business based in Thurmont, Maryland. In 1960, Jim Codori's father purchased the monument business and brought it over the Mason-Dixon Line to Adams County, where Codori Memorials has operated since.

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