



Walsh University Chapel - 2007 Ohio Golden Trowel Award Winner.



Chapel under construction showing loadbearing masonry walls.

## Structural Masonry: A Natural Choice for Walsh Chapel

By Stephanie Staub

When Walsh University decided to add a new chapel to its 107-acre campus in North Canton, Ohio, officials there were looking for more than a building. They wanted an external symbol for the faith-based university that would also anchor their master plan for a new quad.

The aesthetic challenge for the monument-in-the-making was matching the overall theme of the campus while at the same time offering a unique new look for the chapel, which features a soaring steeple. Another issue was a challenging site with various grade drops that would accommodate walkways and parking areas.

The solution was structural masonry. Says structural engineer Gordon Baker, P.E., of Thorson Baker & Associates in Richfield, Ohio, "because of the roof structure, its shape and a lot of different elevations, masonry was used as part of the structure". The tent-like shape of the building, along with a dynamic structural steel and timber roof structure, made load-bearing masonry a natural solution. Steel and masonry played a harmonious role with unusual roof peaks.

### Project Team

Walsh University  
Thorson Baker & Associates  
Peninsula Architects  
Fred Olivieri Construction Company  
GMR Builders, Inc.  
Bricklayers & Allied Craftworkers Local 6 Ohio

Stephanie Staub is the New Jersey Marketing Director for the International Masonry Institute, and is the program coordinator for the Golden Trowel Awards.  
[www.imiweb.org](http://www.imiweb.org)

Further masonry dimensions for the 13,000 square-foot, 300-seat chapel with classrooms and meeting rooms include concrete bearing walls, concrete columns and a stone veneer of natural limestone, Ohio top rock (a rubble limestone) and architectural precast concrete.

The construction challenges included tall walls with unique window openings, and floor structure and floor heights with limited clearance. The solution was highly skilled craftworkers certified by the International Masonry Institute in grout and reinforced masonry.

For the massive limestone panels, some of which weighed nearly 1,500 pounds, masonry contractor GMR Builders decided that a crane was the most efficient, and simplest, way to piece the panels together. A further challenge

for craftworkers was the mid-September construction, which meant setting the stone veneer under an enclosed site as cold weather arrived. That slowed the process a bit, but the project was completed by early spring, thanks to teamwork, says GMR Builders President Mike Rohr. "It took the whole crew working together to build a chapel that is truly unique in design and structure."

That uniqueness garnered Walsh University Chapel a 2007 Ohio Golden Trowel Award. The International Masonry Institute (IMI), a labor-management cooperation fund of the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC) and contractors dedicated to craft training and quality design and construction, sponsors the awards program to recognize the highest quality in masonry design and craftsmanship. ■



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