

Where Building Is An Art Celebrating 50 Years

An Interview with Frank J. Sciamè Jr., Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Sciamè Construction, LLC

EDITORS' NOTE Frank J. Sciamè, Jr. established F. J. Sciamè Construction Co., Inc. (Sciamè) in 1975. In the years since, he has led the firm to its current position as one of the Tri-State's leading construction management firms. Sciamè serves on the boards of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, New York Building Congress, and the Alliance for Downtown New York. He is Chairman of the Foundation for City College and serves as an advisor to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations Industry Advisory Group. He is the recipient of more than 30 prestigious awards including EY's 1996 Entrepreneur of the Year. Sciamè earned a degree in architecture from CCNY.



Frank J. Sciamè Jr.

What have been the keys to Sciamè's industry leadership, and how do you define the Sciamè difference?

I think one of the things that differentiates Sciamè in the industry is our high regard for architectural design and respect for the built environment. Both Joseph Mizzi, my President, COO and partner, and I have degrees in architecture. With this, we approach each project with a keen sense of design perspective and with a high level of respect for the architects we work with. Our back-

ground in architecture helps us to cost effectively build projects "as designed." If we are successful, it is a win-win-win for all – the owner, the architect, and the Sciamè team.

How important is it for Sciamè to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?

A diverse and inclusive workforce is key to the success of any organization. I think the glowing example of this was – and still is – represented by the City College of New York where I received my degree in architecture. It was the original DEI campus. Their diverse and tremendously successful alumni achieved incredible accomplishments including discovering the polio vaccine and designing the Panama Canal. Alums include Supreme Court Justices, Secretaries of State, numerous Nobel Prize winners, leaders of industry, world-renowned researchers, and award-winning actors and musicians. But it is important to keep in mind that admission to the college was originally free based solely on merit from which diversity naturally thrived.

FIRM BRIEF Sciamè Construction, LLC (sciamè.com) is a New York City-based construction management firm, recognized throughout the Tri-State Area as the builder of choice for highly designed and technically sophisticated projects. Sciamè brings a 50-year history and a proven track record of completing a wide range of buildings and interior spaces on time and within budget. The firm's diverse and dedicated staff continuously demonstrate a commitment to find creative construction techniques to preserve design intent and to deliver the highest standards of workmanship.

How do you describe Sciamè's mission and purpose?

As we embark on our next 50 years, our mission and purpose are a bit different. When I first began, I knew the odds were stacked against me. I understood that the chance of a new business succeeding, for even five years, was slim to none. And so, 50 years ago, our mission was one of survival. I soon learned that a mission that promised high quality work on time and on budget with honesty and integrity would be the winning formula. Fifty years later, I am proud to say that our backlog is now around \$4 billion. As I look forward to the next 50 years, our purpose and mission will remain the same, even as a much larger organization. We plan to continue to have the agility of a smaller company and deliver the same customer service we have always promised, with honesty and integrity as our guiding principles. This is the tried-and-true winning formula that I can say I am proud of, and one we believe will positively impact the built environment.



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At Sciamé, we share a similar philosophy in the way we recruit, retain, and promote our staff and team members on our projects. In the construction industry, only the best of the best can sustain positions as leaders and key contributors at all levels. This requires us to select only the most qualified candidates for the job at hand. We are proud to say that our diverse and inclusive group of hard-working people have been the key to our success.

What do you see as Sciamé's responsibility to be engaged in the communities it serves and a force for good in society?

At Sciamé, we believe that with great success comes the great responsibility to give back. I am honored to have been a recipient of the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Medal by the Municipal Arts Society, an award dedicated to those who make a lasting imprint on the city through vision, leadership, and philanthropy. As former Chairman and current board member of the Landmarks Conservancy, I also have a strong responsibility to help preserve the very best of our city's heritage today so that those may relish in its history tomorrow. Joseph Mizzi also shares this same philanthropic passion for our community, society, as well as in the arts. He is currently the longstanding Chair of the Bronx Museum of the Arts and Co-Founder of 14+ Foundation, an organization dedicated to the development, building, and operating of schools in rural African communities.

What do you see as the keys to effective leadership and how do you approach your management style?

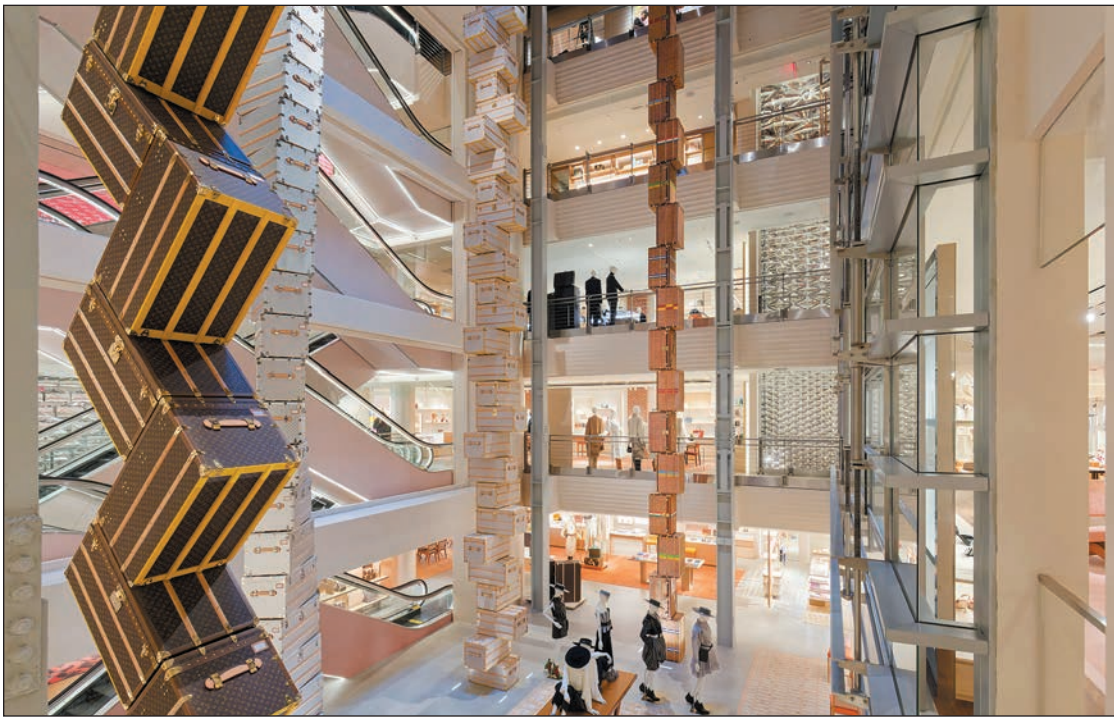
I think effective leadership requires being authentic and compassionate. Leaders inevitably are – and should be – under the microscope. Every word spoken and action taken will be observed and remembered. Being honest and authentic in terms of who you are and where you want to take the organization is vital. I also believe that compassion and empathy in all aspects of life is important, as well as having respect for those who work tirelessly for you. I truly believe that our people are our most important asset. Being sensitive and compassionate to their needs at work and at home are vital to their success, and by extension, vital to the success of the organization as a whole.

I would call my management style fair, but firm. We have demanding clients, and it is our responsibility to meet those demands. I try to make the meeting of these demands – to the extent possible – fun. “Work Hard, Play Hard” is one of our core values.



Louis Vuitton Trunks

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Louis Vuitton 57th Street flagship (above); Rendering of the Studio Museum in Harlem (below)

Sciame is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. As the company reaches this milestone, are you able to reflect on what Sciame has accomplished over five decades?

As we approach our 50th Anniversary, I reflect on what we have accomplished almost every day. What we have accomplished is beyond my wildest expectations when we opened our doors in 1975. As I reflect on what we have accomplished, I am enormously proud of the positive impact our iconic buildings have had and will continue to have on the built environment. I also reflect on and am grateful to the great architects, engineers, clients, subcontractors, business associates, laborers, craftsmen, and people of all stripes that have supported us on this incredible journey.

Looking back, I also see that a driving force was my early desire to create success for myself and my family. My family is by far my greatest accomplishment. My wife, Barbara, and I will be celebrating our 50th Wedding Anniversary this year. I quit my job and started Sciame Construction three months before we got married. Barbara's support (initially as my part time executive assistant) was invaluable. We have been blessed with four children who I couldn't be prouder of and who are all working to grow and enhance the Sciame Brand. They have blessed us with 12 grandchildren. As the success developed, my Sciame company "family" grew. That desire for success extended to the people who worked for and with me. Many are still with me today after many decades together, including our long-standing EVP of Field Operations, Ralph Thompson, who has been at the firm for 43 years. People like Ralph bet on Sciame and put their careers in Sciame's hands, and for that I am eternally grateful. Leading this team of incredible people was and is first



and foremost an honor, but also an enormous responsibility that requires continued success on the part of the organization to foster their careers, something I am very in tune with. We do not view this responsibility as a burden. Rather we view it as motivation for the next 50 years. We will continue to work hard not to let our people down, and with their help enjoy even greater success in the decades to come.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in the construction industry?

That's an important question. A career in the construction industry is not for the faint of heart. You have to love the challenges that come with building. It has been said that the difference between a career and a job is about an additional 35 hours per week. This is especially true for the construction industry. Opening deadlines will require spurts of working 24/7. Loving what you do is the only way to make it bearable. But the pride of seeing a completed, successful project will make it all worthwhile. It will be a brick-and-mortar testament to your hard work. This to me is what continues to have me say – "God I Love this Business."

If you love building and are not afraid of hard work – go for it! ●