

## REBUILDING THE WTC

# Tower's cornerstone rock-steady

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It isn't every day that a 20-ton slab of rock attracts so much attention — unless it's the Freedom Stone.

That's the name a Long Island stone company has given to what will become the cornerstone of the soon to be built Freedom Tower at the World Trade Center site.

Yesterday, the slab was resting on the back of a flatbed truck in the parking lot of Innovative Marble and Tile in Hauppauge as workers erected scaffolding around the garnet-flecked granite so it could be polished today, when Gov. George Pataki is expected to visit. Engraving could begin at the end of this week (the inscription hasn't been disclosed yet) and by the end of next week, it will be brought to lower Manhattan.

On Independence Day, Pataki will preside over a ceremony to lay the cornerstone at the southeast corner of the building, marking the start of construction on what would be the world's tallest building, at 1,776 feet.

Karen Pearce, founder of Inno-

vative, said the 23-year-old company is "sleeping, eating, and breathing" this project, with about two dozen of its 200 employees dedicated to it.

Innovative was selected by the Silverstein organization, the master lease holder of the World Trade Center site. Innovative had worked with a Silverstein executive, David Worsley, when he was with Related Companies building the Time Warner Center, said Janno Lieber, Silverstein's project director. Innovative has also worked on the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas and the Roosevelt Field mall.

In the past three weeks, Innovative scoped out various pieces of stone and sent digital photos and samples to Silverstein, who conferred with the governor. The stone they picked from a quarry in the Adirondacks is a blend of feldspar, quartz, hornblende and garnet, which gives it an appearance of black and gray, with flecks of red and pale green. Garnet is the gemstone of New York State.

Last week, a team from Innovative drilled out the block and transported it about 200 miles



Karen Pearce, founder of Innovative Marble and Tile, with the Freedom Tower's cornerstone, which appears black and gray with flecks of red and green.

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MICHAEL E. ACH

to Hauppauge. The raw stone was cut into a rectangular shape at Innovative this week, said Anthony Iorio, the project manager, and will be smoothed and polished today. Innovative has agreed to donate the stone, worth about \$14,000.

The stone may not be visible once the building is erected — it will be four levels below the

street — but that makes no difference to Pearce and Iorio.

"I'm humbled and proud to even have a small part in this," said Pearce, 45.

State Comptroller Alan Hevesi recently announced a \$3-million investment by the NYS Common Retirement Fund in Innovative that was matched by its private equity partner,

Manhattan-based Easton Hunt Capital Partners. The investment was made in January, before Hevesi or Easton even knew about the cornerstone project, said Ed Meyer, managing director at Easton Hunt.

"I've always thought it was a good investment," Meyer said.

LIZ SMITH IS ON VACATION



INNOVATIVE  
STONE