

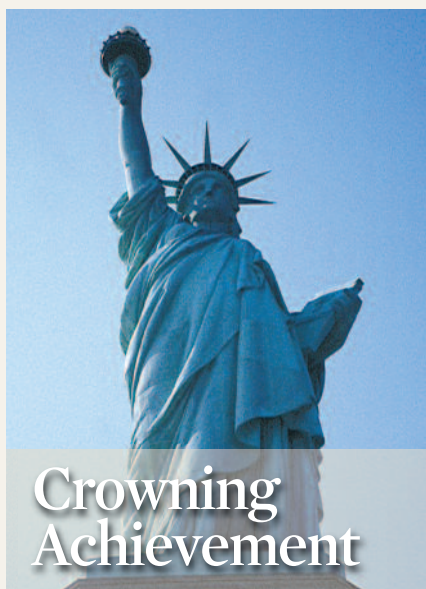
# The Grapevine

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## Crowning Achievement

A local business helps pave the way for visitors to climb to Lady Liberty's crown for the first time since before September 11, 2001.

{DEBORAH A. EIN}

Anton Popeskic was just 13 years old when he arrived in America with his parents and sister. It was March 1969 when the four of them first saw the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor. It was symbolic of hope and a new life in America, as his parents yearned for a better life than they had known in their native Croatia (Yugoslavia).

Popeskic could not have known then that 40 years later, in June of

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## Statue of Liberty

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this year, that he would be working to bolster that symbolic icon.

"When I told my parents, my mom cried," Popeskic says. "It was an honor to work on it."

As a fabricator/installer at Southern New Jersey Steel Company, the Glendora resident was sent to work in the Statue last month. According to company owner Hugh McCaffrey, Southern New Jersey Steel "was contacted by the general contractor for the Life and Safety Improvements within the Statue of Liberty project to supply additional technical manpower to support his steel subcontractor in order to meet the pending July Fourth deadline," when there was to be a dedication and celebration at Liberty Island.

"We were able to supply him with three shop fabricators who had the technical expertise to work in his subcontractor's fabrication facility in northern New Jersey," says McCaffrey. "Our men were able to supplement the subcontractor's crew by helping operate the rail form-



Anton Popeskic, left, and Carlo Gentiletti worked at the base of the Statue of Liberty last month.



ing/bending equipment along with providing the proper welding and polishing for the stainless steel railings that were being installed to the crown of the statue."

According to the National Park Service website, the tragedy of September 11, 2001 resulted in the closure of Liberty Island. The island re-opened after 100 days, but the Statue remained closed until August 3, 2004. Until July 4, 2009, the pedestal level

was the highest point visitors could access.

"The project was very difficult to fabricate," says McCaffrey, "because of the tight twisting conditions that had to be achieved to fit people properly into the narrow space. There are not many steel fabricators who have this expertise and we felt privileged that we were the company they contacted to help them."

Anthony Bertonazzi, Stan Murray and Daryl Gould are the three workers who worked at the northern New Jersey Fabricators facility.

Bertonazzi, from East Vineland, is from a farm family that traces its American roots back a few generations. He worked for a week and a half last month in the northern New Jersey shop, agrees that building and welding the handrails was difficult work, due to "the pitch and radius of the stairs. There was nothing typical about it," he says. "It was very tight, to get everything to fit."

McCaffrey says: "We also provided two field personnel to help cut and install a new hatch opening in the existing base of the statue for entry. This work was also very difficult since you had to try to achieve this work without penetrating the original framework of the Statue. There was a federal inspector who monitored every move of this process to ensure that this was completed properly."

Popeskic performed that work in the Statue. He defined his work as more "meticulous" than it was difficult, as he worked two nighttime shifts "at the feet of the Statue."

Carlo Gentiletti, a former co-owner of Southern New Jersey Steel, was by Popeskic's side, providing field supervision. In 1953 at age 13, he emigrated to America from Italy.

"It's the American dream," Gentiletti says, to have come to the States as a teenager, settle in Vineland and become a business owner, then to have that business entrusted to do important work on a landmark such as the Statue of Liberty. ☞

## Statue Stats

- The Statue of Liberty was a gift from the people of France in recognition of the friendship established between the two countries during the American Revolution.
- Artist Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi, known for large-scale work, was commissioned to design the sculpture. Bartholdi recruited French engineer Alexandre Gustave Eiffel to build a skeleton for his statue.
- Eiffel designed a massive iron pylon and secondary skeletal framework that allows the Statue's copper skin to move independently—yet stand upright. This flexibility is needed to allow the Statue to sway in the sometimes violent harbor winds.
- The 25 windows in the crown symbolize gemstones and heaven's rays shining over the world.
- The seven rays of the crown represent the seven seas and continents of the world.
- Lady Liberty's face is said to be modeled after the sculptor's mother.
- The Statue gets struck by lightning many times each year.
- The Statue of Liberty was dedicated in 1886, designated as a National Monument in 1924 and restored for its centennial on July 4, 1986.
- The Statue's original torch was the first part constructed in 1876. In 1984 it was replaced by a new copper torch covered in 24K gold leaf that is lighted by floodlight at night. The original torch is currently located in the lobby of the monument. Access to the torch has been closed since 1916.

Source: National Park Service

## If You Go...

Planning ahead is essential to making the most of your visit to the Statue of Liberty. Here is information you'll need to prepare for and plan your visit.

- Ticket Reservation System: Reserve tickets to the pedestal, crown and Liberty Island from Statue Cruises. Choose which visit fits your schedule and interests, then call 1-877-LADY-TIX or book tickets online at [www.statuecruises.com](http://www.statuecruises.com).

- Be aware that the climb to the crown is a strenuous 354 steps in a cramped enclosed area with high temperatures. The steps are 19 inches wide, are shallow and taper at one end. Head clearance is 6 feet 2 inches. Children must be at least 4 feet tall.
- Visitors to the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island must pass through security screening (similar to airport security) before boarding the ferry system and entering the monument. There can be wait times at these screening areas.

- Access to the crown is limited to 10 people at a time.
- The Statue will be open for the next two years, then closed for "work...that will improve safety and security permanently," according to the U.S. Department of the Interior.
- Get all your questions answered at <http://www.nps.gov/stli/planyourvisit>