



Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry

By Jon Otto w/ Jim Showers



The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry (FOI) began in Philadelphia in 1938 to help Jewish people escape their suffering in the Holocaust. From its beginning, it has been their mission to bring physical and spiritual comfort to the Jewish people while teaching biblical truth about Israel and the Messiah. Many people have come to know The Friends of Israel through its award-winning magazine *Israel My Glory*, their weekend radio program, *The Friends of Israel Today*, and their conferences. Their international headquarters, the expansion of which is the topic of this newsletter, is located on a beautiful 130-acre campus in Deptford, New Jersey.

With a staff of 125 in North America and 18 international countries, the pandemic of 2020, led The



Friends of Israel to rethink the means by which they reached people with their teaching and message of comfort for Israel. Forced to shut down travel and public meetings, President Jim Showers and his team recognized the need to enlarge the Friends of Israel's digital footprint to reach people and expand their outreach. Jim and his audio-visual production team had





High Water Table



Soil Stabilization



Well Heads Enable Foundation

been limping along by working out of the facility's chapel. This was only a stopgap. A new studio was urgently needed. It had long been planned to build a new maintenance building on the site. So, Jim, with his board of director's concurrence, decided to attack both projects with the related sitework at the same time.

doors, but; its site superintendent on its last job for the Friends of Israel, Bryan Patton had come to work for Penn Valley in early January of 2021. With a recommendation from Mark Worthington and Bryan Patton on our team, Jim decided Penn Valley was the right choice for the project.



Steel Erection



High "R" Block Thermal & Acoustical Insulation

In the late winter of 2021 Jim started to look for a design/build contractor who could help design and construct the recording studio and the much-needed new maintenance facility. The Friends of Israel's previous contractor, Worthington Construction, had closed its

So it was that in the spring of 2021 we started to meet with Jim, Walter Homan, the Manager of Buildings and Grounds and Head of Security, and the Friends of Israel audio-visual team. After the initial meetings, we chose as our design team; John Shortall as the Architect,



Roof Liner Installation



Truss Installation at Studio



Leonard Busch Associates as structural engineers, GNP Design Group as mechanical engineers and Mulhern Consulting Engineers as electrical engineers.

At our first meeting and often thereafter, we confessed to Jim that “the next studio we built would also be the first”. Jim already knew the project needed a studio consultant and with his team had been interviewing some people without really finding “the guy”. He asked us to help find the right company. We in turn asked Terry Mulhern, Principal of Mulhern Consulting Engineers, for his advice. When we made our inquiry of Terry, he didn’t miss a beat, he said, “I have just the guy, Brandon Creel.” Brandon, a partner at Hewshott was the perfect addition to the design team. ([Hewshott link on back page](#)) His knowledge of acoustics, audio-visual, rigging, studio lighting and all of the other nuances that are part of a state-of-the-art studio virtually assured the success of the studio portion of the project.

We now had the full team in place and working together we started the design of the two building projects. It soon became evident that with the sitework, we actually had three projects: the site, a 9,000 SF maintenance facility and the 3,000 SF studio. Each of these projects would cost about \$2,000,000.

Owing to the usual and some perhaps unusual difficulties in getting land development approval, construction did not begin until the fall of 2022. We learned early on in the construction, that even though we had done extensive soil investigations, beneath The Friends of Israel’s beautiful bucolic campus

there were some real challenges. We knew the soil was “moisture sensitive” and in a perfect world, starting in the late fall would not have been the best choice. But, we were already late in starting, we had no choice but to start. We were prepared for the poor bearing capacity of the soils under the maintenance building and had a plan to remove and replace the unsuitable soils with good structural fill. What could not be anticipated was the seasonal high-water table. This forced us to install well heads both to complete the tie in of the sanitary sewer and to install the foundations at the studio addition.

Fortunately, when we explained the unforeseen circumstances and how best to deal with them, Jim made decisions quickly and decisively. This allowed us to move through the deep and wet excavations before we were taken in the grip of winter. The other major complications we met at the project were the incredible price volatility and long material lead times that were part of what we have come to call “construction in the time of Covid”.





Maintenance Building

Once again, Jim's willingness and ability to make decisions not only saved the Friends of Israel tens of thousands of dollars, but also allowed us to pre-order and sometimes prepay for critical materials so we could be guaranteed to have them on site when we needed them and with the price protected. This was essential to keeping the project on schedule.

attention to detail was second to none. From the design phase to project budget, to selection of subcontractors, to management of the project, they were the definition of professional. We are very pleased with our new facilities and are grateful for all Penn Valley Constructors did to help us turn our dreams into reality."



Vehicle Storage Bays

To those kind words, we can only respond that it's impossible to have a good project without a "Good Customer"! Jim and his team epitomize the "Good Customer"; Jim with his always fair treatment and commitment to making timely decisions and the whole organization with its willingness to help with details when help was needed.

[Hewshott link:](http://www.hewshott.com/case-study-friends-of-israel-gospel-ministry/)

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Construction was completed in the early summer of 2023, and it was our pleasure to be able to share in the celebration with the Friends of Israel's staff and board of directors at its Annual Harvest dinner last fall. Jim made Bryan and me both blush when he wrote the following in advance of that meeting, "The communication with Penn Valley Constructors throughout the project and their

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