

Dredging up business

On a brisk March morning under the Belt Parkway in southern Brooklyn's Marine Park, a vibrating hammer rumbled to life, driving a 60-foot steel piling through the silt and mud, deep into the creek bed below. Chris Duffy and his crew from J.T. Cleary had been working since dawn setting up the columns of the new Gerritsen Inlet Bridge.

The span it will replace currently supports 10,000 vehicles a day on wood pilings, one of the 789 bridges that New Yorkers cross every day without a second thought. Only a half-dozen companies have expertise in such deep foundations, so when the Department of Transportation needs to upgrade an aging bridge—it plans on replacing 16 each year—it often turns to J.T. Cleary.

John Cleary, a commercial diver for 20 years before founding the firm in 1995, has left his mark on the city's edge. "For virtually every project on the coastline, I've inspected it, written a report on it or worked on it," said Cleary.

In 2005, the company's portfolio expanded to dredging, another vital yet overlooked service. It helped the Army Corps of Engineers dredge Sandy Hook Bay, southeast of Staten Island. The excavated material was transferred to Jersey City to enhance the resiliency of its shoreline.

"It's all about technical know-how," said Carol Shobrook, who joined J.T. Cleary to head up dredging operations. "We have a deep bench here." — PETER D'AMATO