

# SEISMIC

## EFFORTS SAVE AN ICON

**An earthquake's tremors set in motion a frantic 24-hour effort to secure a sacred statue** By Erik Highland

**A**t 1:51 p.m. on Wednesday, Aug. 23, 2011, an earthquake with a 5.8 magnitude rocked the East Coast. It was followed by two smaller aftershocks of 2.8 and 2.2 magnitudes. On the whole, structural damage throughout the region was fairly limited given the wide scope of the quake.

But, as the world soon discovered, several national structures were damaged, such as the Washington Monument and the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. And more than 140 miles to the northeast of these well-known edifices, a national treasure in Camden, N.J., was teetering on the brink of disaster.

### A FLURRY OF FAST ACTIONS

At the Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center, the earthquake had caused sections of a 30-foot, 15-ton statue of the Virgin Mary to shift. A crack rippled down the statue's side, and pieces had broken off, toppling to the ground.

Walt Wenner, operations manager at the hospital, was understandably concerned. "The big fear was that an aftershock would topple the 62-year-old statue of Mother Mary, not only breaking the iconic figure but endangering patrons of the medical center," he said. Thus, the morning after the quake, Wenner was on the phone with the emergency services unit of Superior

## TIMELINE OF A RESCUE

### WEDNESDAY, AUG. 23, 2011

**1:15 p.m.** Earthquake jolts East Coast of United States.

### THURSDAY, AUG. 24

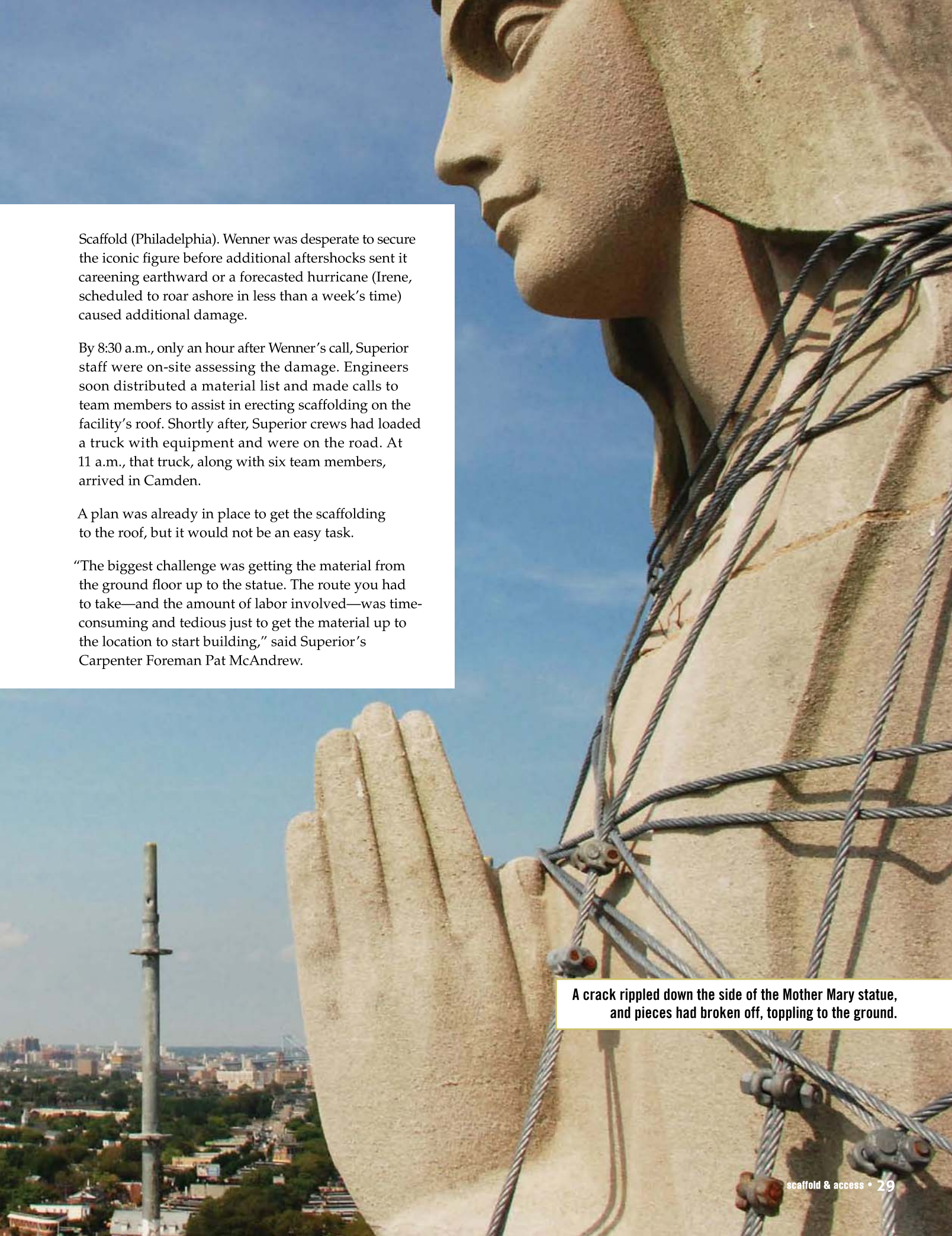
**7:30 a.m.** Walt Wenner, operations manager of Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center (Camden, N.J.), calls Superior Scaffold.

**8:30 a.m.** Superior crews begin assessing damage to Mother Mary statue. Call for materials list and additional crew members.

**11 a.m.** Equipment truck and six team members arrive to begin building scaffold to secure iconic figure.

### FRIDAY, AUG. 25

**3 a.m.** Scaffold crews finish erection task.



Scaffold (Philadelphia). Wenner was desperate to secure the iconic figure before additional aftershocks sent it careening earthward or a forecasted hurricane (Irene, scheduled to roar ashore in less than a week's time) caused additional damage.

By 8:30 a.m., only an hour after Wenner's call, Superior staff were on-site assessing the damage. Engineers soon distributed a material list and made calls to team members to assist in erecting scaffolding on the facility's roof. Shortly after, Superior crews had loaded a truck with equipment and were on the road. At 11 a.m., that truck, along with six team members, arrived in Camden.

A plan was already in place to get the scaffolding to the roof, but it would not be an easy task.

"The biggest challenge was getting the material from the ground floor up to the statue. The route you had to take—and the amount of labor involved—was time-consuming and tedious just to get the material up to the location to start building," said Superior's Carpenter Foreman Pat McAndrew.

**A crack rippled down the side of the Mother Mary statue, and pieces had broken off, toppling to the ground.**

To assemble the scaffold, crews delivered equipment to the rear of the hospital where they loaded it into a freight elevator. They ascended to the eighth floor, the highest point to which the elevator travelled. Next, they moved the materials, by hand, down a long hallway, up two flights of winding stairs and out a door to the second roof portion. There, they built a 15-foot jump tower via which they could hand-pass the rest of the material up to the lower roof—but not to begin construction. This was only the location at which they would stockpile all of the scaffolding.

Crews then had to build a small tower off which they could hang a rope and wheel at the statue's base to begin hoisting materials up to the statue, where scaffold assembly could finally begin.

Transporting materials was only half the challenge. Other issues further complicated crews' efforts. McAndrew said, "One issue was that when we were halfway done building [the scaffold], the wind started blowing to the point that I was almost ready to shut it down." Another complication: Lack of visibility. Dusk had passed and night had settled in long before crews were done erecting the scaffold. "We finished up at 3 a.m.," McAndrew noted. And while crews had four spotlights with

which to work, three were directed at the statue itself, leaving only one to illuminate the scaffold erection.

Making the job even more challenging, time constraints did not allow for the development of blueprints or engineers' directions to guide crews' efforts. "We didn't know if it was going to topple over on us as we were building, so we were trying to get it done as quickly as possible," McAndrew explained, adding that crews were "pretty much flying by the seat of our pants."

### WORKING UNTIL THE WEE HOURS

Despite the desperate situation and the fast-moving pace, less than 24 hours after receiving the emergency call, Superior's team had finished the job.

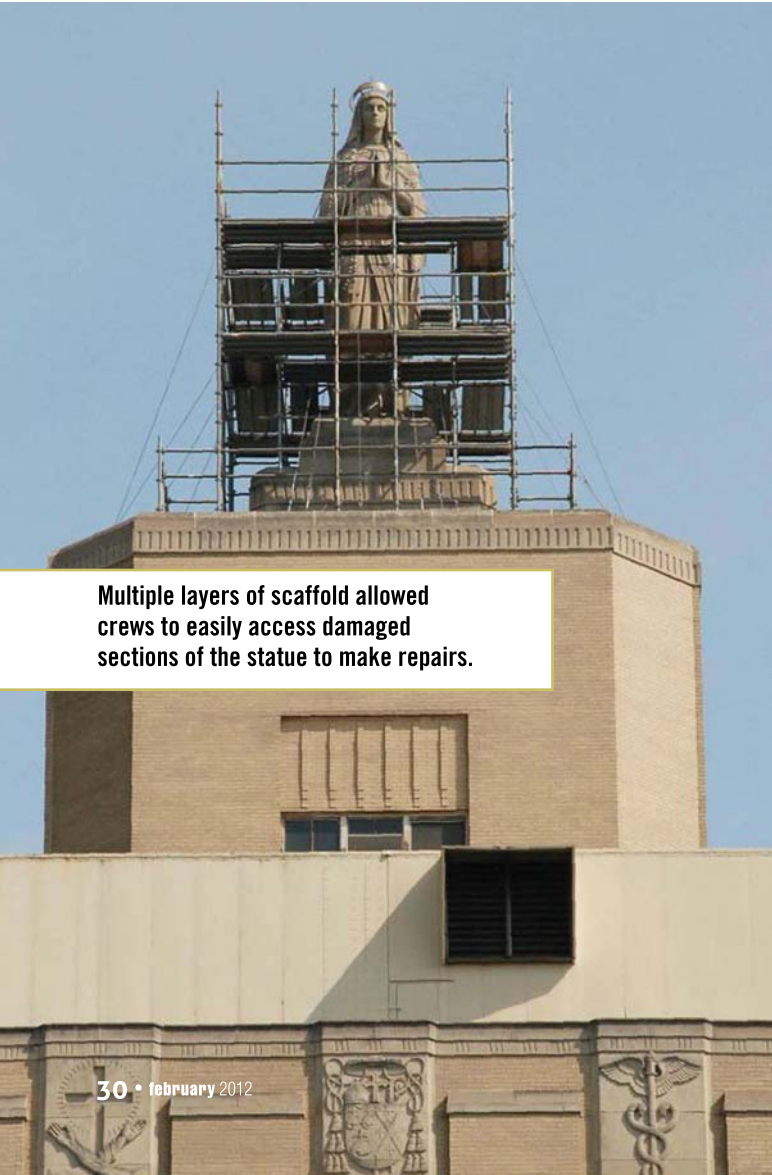
Wenner was more than pleased. "Our biggest concern was aftershocks, but we also knew that we had another hurricane coming up the East Coast on Sunday." So getting the statue secured was paramount. Plus, Wenner said hospital executives were eager to re-open the main entrance to the hospital. "I thought that Pat and his crew at Superior Scaffold did a wonderful job. I was impressed with their rapid response and their effort over that long night. They were both productive and efficient."

Since that first fateful 24 hours, Superior returned to the job to add another level of scaffolding to the existing structure. The additional stage allowed crews to more easily remove damaged sections of the Mother Mary statue. After crews dismantled three top sections, a restoration firm repaired and cleaned them. Later, those workers did the same to the bottom three sections, which remained in place. Before the start of 2012, plans were to reinstall the top sections.

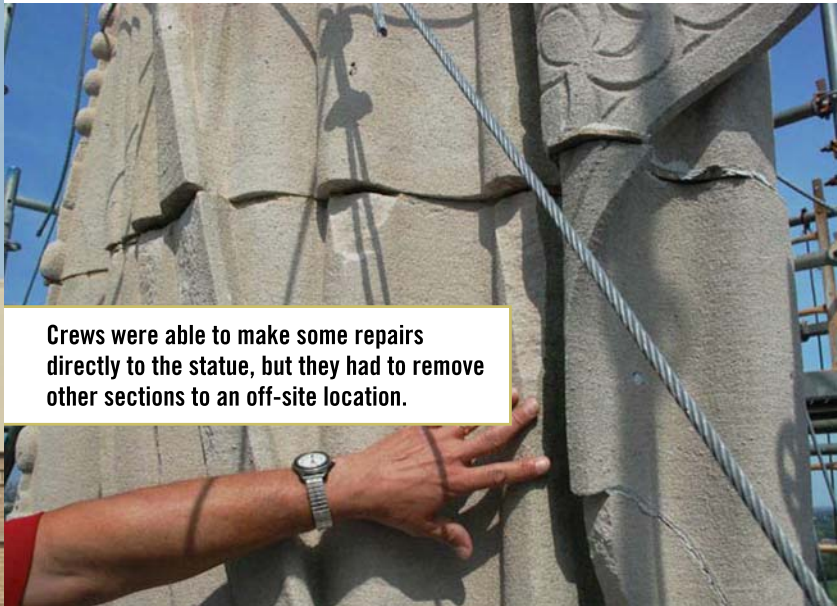
In the end, the quick actions of both Our Lady of Lourdes Medical Center and the crew from Superior Scaffold saved an iconic figure from near-certain disaster.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Multiple layers of scaffold allowed crews to easily access damaged sections of the statue to make repairs.



Crews were able to make some repairs directly to the statue, but they had to remove other sections to an off-site location.