Actor, movie maker, cancer survivor: Successful Boiler Engineer, Frank Lisi is one of those people with boundless energy and limitless ideas. And while he has almost 25 years with Rutgers as a boiler engineer and currently shop steward, his energy and creativity have led to a second career as an actor, film writer, and director.

Frank Lisi, center, with fellow actors, Charles S. Dutton, right, and Vinny Vella, left.

Lisi studied acting in New York City when his daughter dropped out of an acting class she was taking. There was no refund for the class, so he jumped into it. "I always wanted to be an entertainer," Lisi said. "My mom said it started when I was about 5 years old." In his 20s, Lisi did some Elvis impersonating, but the acting bug really hit when his daughter was born. "She loved to watch herself for hours in home movies."

His daughter started to pursue an acting career, and Lisi began to meet the right people including some agents. His daughter gave up her career in acting, and he pursued his. "I started to land background roles, featured background, which is when you are actually in the shot rather than being among a crowd," Lisi explained. He kept getting call backs from David Chase of The Sopranos. Eventually he was competing for other roles against far bigger names, and he decided to work on his own short films instead.

Lisi made his directorial debut at The New York International Independent Film and Video Festival in the spring of 2009. His short film "A Sicilian Tale" was awarded "Best Crime Drama Short" at the festival.

When I look around our campuses, I am often in awe of the quiet impact our department has on this institution. By providing classroom space that enhances learning, research labs that create environments to deliver breakthroughs, lounge and living spaces that foster lifelong friendships and professional collaborations, we really do contribute to the success of Rutgers. Then I look further and realize how much we contribute to our neighborhoods.

The renovation of Newark’s 15 Washington Street, for example, will do so much for that historic little neighborhood. Sometimes it is easy to forget that there are people other than those affiliated with Rutgers living and working in the neighborhoods around our campuses. This particular renovation provides much needed housing for Rutgers, but it also restores the beauty of a bygone era, of a bustling and historic business district that is steadily improving. I am proud we are playing a key role in this.

While it is always wonderful to build and open a brand new building, it is equally thrilling to restore a building and recover its historical value. By doing so, we not only help to improve our cities, towns, and neighborhoods, but we pay homage to the original architects and builders whose projects were also created with a sense of great pride and integrity for the area. As we go about our work day, it’s important to remember how many lives we touch through our hard work and vision, and that these lives may never attend Rutgers or work at Rutgers, but will be impacted in the most positive way by the way in which we maintain and grow our campuses.

Tony Calcado
Historic 15 Washington renovation will enhance James Street District

Construction crews are busy preparing the American Insurance Building at 15 Washington Street, for its complete renovation which will restore and retain its neo-classical design. The building will open in August 2015 housing graduate and undergraduate students and the Rutgers Newark Chancellor whose apartment will be in the highest part of the building's tower. It will include common areas and conference space, and other amenities for residence living.

A designated landmark under Newark's Landmark Commission, 15 Washington Street is one of the tallest buildings in Newark. At the time of its construction it was the tallest building in Newark and then was surpassed is one of the tallest buildings in Newark. At the time of its construction it was the tallest building in Newark and then was surpassed.

The building's floors had to be able to hold 50 tons. With the pre-renovation phase nearly done, and the contractors plans complete and under review, the actual restoration will begin shortly.

“The entire building will be renovated,” said Thomas Boland, Director of Facilities Project Services, Rutgers University Newark campus. “The main hall with its marble foyer and striking chandeliers will remain intact, and the original glass and bronze revolving door will remain in place.” The main hall is about 120 feet long and 60 feet wide. The windows are over 15 feet high. While most of the building’s windows have been removed, they will be replaced with windows that reflect the architecture of the original building. “The windows have to look nearly identical and original,” Boland said.

The building was completed on November 1, 1930. An original 20 foot long mahogany conference room table remains in the conference room. “I would like to remove it during the renovation and then bring it back in, but its size makes this a difficult proposition. We may have to carefully work around it,” Boland said.

The terrazzo and travertine floors in the main lobby will be restored. Because insurance companies maintain numerous files of papers and often have large libraries of books, the building's floors had to be able to hold substantial weight. The one foot thick floors in 15 Washington also made it ideal for the law school, as law offices and law schools also maintain reams of paper and shelves of books—often large and heavy books.

The building's original architects, John and Wilson Ely, a father son team, were known for their classical revival style. Many of their buildings are listed on historic registrars nationwide. Much of their work is in Newark, as the company was domiciled there.

The Ely's distinguished projects include Newark City Hall, Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company Home Office Building, National Newark Building, East Orange City Hall, and Morristown Memorial Hospital.

“The exterior of the building is brick and limestone,” Boland said, “and the Greek columns were designed to match the columns on the library next door.” In addition to 15 Washington with its neo-classical tower, the James Street Commons Historic District encompasses Washington Park, the Newark Museum, and the Newark Public Library.

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“The Director’s Room with the 20 foot long mahogany table.

“With the pre-renovation phase nearly done, and the contractors plans complete and under review, the actual restoration will begin shortly.” The Director’s Room with the 20 foot long mahogany table.

Interns gain with hands on experience

Rutgers University Civil Engineering students Daniel Gordon and Christopher Sagliocco are getting around New Jersey this summer; from Camden County to Essex County, and while they may not be getting a lot of beach time, they are gaining invaluable experience working on construction projects for University Facilities & Capital Planning. The two students were fortunate to land an internship on the RBHS Newark campus where each one is working with different Facilities’ Project Managers and building a resume in the process.

With a substantial number of projects under way on all of the campuses, there is plenty to do. Sagliocco has worked on a conference room renovation, as well as completing the punch list on the recently renovated Medical School Vivarium highlighted in the last issue of Facilities Focus. “The conference room is being renovated to include two offices and work space. With the vivarium, I am walking through and making sure connections are working and the loose ends are tied up,” Sagliocco said.

For Gordon, a New Jersey Dental School C-level fit-out is part of his portfolio this summer as is the renovation of a group home in Berlin, NJ, which is being done for University Behavioral Health Sciences. “The Dental School fit-out will include 87 new operatories. I am also helping with smaller projects, as well as a house which is being renovated for use as a group home,” Gordon said.

Both young men are enjoying their internships and finding that being in the field really brings the classroom learning to life. “We’ve definitely found that the bid process for on-call consultants is much more streamlined than we expected. There are so many projects, but the Architect/Engineer award process gets done in no time and the projects get underway,” Gordon said, as he compared classroom experience to hands-on experience. The two interns will clearly be ready to enter their senior year with experience and a valuable boost to their resumes when the job hunt begins. Each is deciding between a career path toward project management or structural design. Of course the RBHS project managers guiding the two interns hope to see them pursue both, professional engineers make good project managers! Both intend to pursue employment upon graduating with the goal of attaining a master’s degree in the evenings while working full time. They will be with the construction group in RBHS Newark through mid-August and each will be enjoying vacation time with their families before returning to the Livingston Campus this fall for their final year.

John Schulack, Associate Vice President, Project Administration said, “It is advantageous to everyone when we can tap the talent pool at Rutgers University. Chris and Dan are doing a great job, gaining invaluable experience, and frankly, with our current work load, their help is really needed.”
The next movie, which Lisi wrote, directed, and produced was based on a story his wife told him. “One day she mentioned that in high school she was a straight ‘A’ student, but she did not get along with her English teacher. During senior year, her final essay somehow went missing, and she would either have to go to summer school or be left back. She did not want to go to summer school, but her parents finally convinced her this would be the best option. “At summer school, she befriended a girl who had a red corvette, and the friendship that developed and the fun they had resulted in the best summer and best semester she had at high school.” For Lisi, the story was a seed for a short movie, admittedly embellished from the story his wife told. The movie was a success. “The Red Corvette” premiered in November of 2011 in New York City at The New York International Film Festival and was awarded the “Audience Award”. Lead actress Valerie Bauer was awarded “Best Actress” in a Feature Film.

Just prior to this in 2006, and while he was working on his film career, Lisi was diagnosed with tongue and tonsil cancer. “Something did not feel right in my throat. It felt like a fishbone was stuck in the back of my throat. It took a few doctor’s visits, but something was finally found at the base of his tongue. The diagnosis: stage four cancer. The resultant treatments were aggressive and difficult. “I needed a feeding tube for a while. I came full circle with my faith,” said Lisi, who is a devotee of Padre Pio, a popular and adored Roman Catholic Saint. Two priests continually visited Lisi in the hospital, and combined with the support from his wife, it carried him through. “I felt loved. Seven years later, I am clear. I am healthy.” The robust Lisi, shows no signs of past illness.

Movie making is an expensive proposition. Internet funding sites like Kickstarter help, but a lot of work goes into the promotion just to get the money for the main production. Lisi films trailers for his movies and uses the trailer to promote the film and raise the needed funds. Actor Charles S. Dutton (Roc, Alien 3, Rudy) is looking at Lisi’s current script which will be a religious based movie about a Franciscan priest tormented by demons. Lisi is currently weighing the possibility of doing a fundraiser on the Rutgers campus.

When he is not working with names like Dutton and Vinny Vella, Lisi can be found on the Rutgers Newark campus at his fulltime job. His children went to college here, and in fact, his daughter recently graduated. “Rutgers is a great place to work,” he said. “I have a few years to go before I retire, my kids received good educations here and I enjoy my work,” he said as he gathered his things at the end of a recent workday. He headed out the door off to work on his upcoming production, the movie which he hopes will help people wake up to their faith. “I know Christ and Padre Pio saved my life,” he said. “I want this movie to result in just one more person saying a prayer.”

Congratulations to University Facilities Mike Fitzgerald Assistant Director, University HR Administration & Training, who received the CHESS Knighthood award recognizing his commitment to health and safety. CHESS stands for the College Health & Environmental Safety Society. “All colleges and universities belong,” said Pete Skeel, Manager Health & Safety Services. Skeel along with Health Safety Specialist, Mike Longo nominated Fitzgerald.

Before coming to University Facilities, Fitzgerald was with Housing Facilities Operations for 16 years and Student Services for 14 years prior to that. The Award of Commendation recognizes his longstanding commitment to health and safety at Rutgers University. “During his 16 years with Housing, Mike oversaw many safety programs and chaired the housing safety committee,” said Skeel. Fitzgerald, far more modest about the recognition said, “I did not do much except promote awareness and make sure people followed the mandates in place. If a health or safety issue did come up, we would investigate and make recommendations if necessary.” Fitzgerald said he often volunteered to head the safety committees. “I was pleasantly surprised to receive the award. Whenever we had a safety issue, I dropped everything to make sure the situation was addressed.” Pictured above, Mike Longo, left and Pete Skeel flank Mike Fitzgerald as he holds his award. Good work Mike! Congratulations.

Congratulations to Alicia Cholula (l) and Shinna Lin who recently passed their citizenship test. They are now official US citizens! Alicia works on the Livingston campus and Shinna works on College Avenue. Both work the 5 am to 1:30 pm shift. Best wishes to both of you!