It's been twenty-five years since Jeff Martell, president of Granite Industries of Vermont, bought the company with his partner Glen Atherton.

"I had a brain cramp," Martell jokes about the decision to stop being a wholesaler.

Located on Vanetti Place in Barre, Vermont the facility has been producing for over one hundred years. In 1903, Valz Brothers, a business owned and operated by cousins Constantino and Guido Valz, built the main building on GIV's site, which is still in operation. The company changed hands in the 1940s and in 1980 was sold to Silvio Nativi and Herman Goldberg, who re-named the business Granite Industries of Vermont. Nativi and Goldberg built a state-of-the-art facility making the decision to concentrate specifically on large-scale building projects, which was a departure from the monuments produced by the previous operations.

Supplying the finished granite work for the Sony/AT&T building on Madison Avenue in New York City—thirty-seven stories clad in Stony Creek Granite—was among the first of their projects, as was work on the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C.

In 1988, Martell and Atherton took over the mill and began to move back to more monument-focused production, this becoming especially true after spending two years fashioning the granite for the Thurgood Marshall Federal Judiciary Building in D.C., which included many sixteen-foot archways.

"It hurt our monument side. That was the straw that broke the camel's back on big construction projects," said Martell. "It was one or the other, so the direction we went in was monuments."

Now Martell says large construction constitutes a small percentage of their business, whereas close to half is supplying the National Cemetery Administration with marble uprights for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs—about 30,000 annually, serving cemeteries in twenty-seven states including uprights for Arlington National Cemetery.

That contract is what makes GIV unique in that they are a year-round operation; there isn't too much fluctuation from season to season.

"We make a concerted effort to keep our guys working," says Martell. "Because the bulk of our industry is monument-focused there's potential for a stagnant period early in the year, but supplying the national cemeteries evens things out."

Creating the memorials for fallen soldiers is something GIV takes pride in and they've also had the opportunity to work on a large number of monuments throughout the country—the National Monument for 9/11 at the Pentagon, the shuttles Columbia and Challenger monuments and the Battle of the Bulge memorial both in Arlington, Virginia, as well as many more.

GIV also produces many custom memorials and mausoleums, which are shipped out every week. A current project is a six-crypt walk-in mausoleum in Mountain Rose granite. Plant manager Louis Scott says every memorial is different.

"There's still art in the granite industry," he comments noting the hand carving that's done on many of the uprights and headstones. "There always will be."

The talented employees that work at GIV are a major reason Martell believes that GIV is still very viable today. Martell points out the loss of twenty-two granite manufacturing companies since 1990, largely due to cheaper imports from countries like China and India, and considers GIV lucky to have been able to expand during that time, going from twenty-three employees when they started to sixty-one today.

"Trying to grow and maintain a business while everything around us is shrinking has been our biggest challenge," he says. "If not for our guys' productivity and quality, if not for that edge, I don't think we'd be here."

Some exciting growth this year is two new state-of-the-art machines coming into the mill. One is currently being built in France by Thibaut; a company that sent its first machine built to the Rock of Ages quarry in Barre, Vermont in 1978. Martell says it takes six or seven months to build because it's designed for specific work done by GIV.

The other machine, which is still in the conceptualization and design phase, will hopefully be built closer to home. Martell has been working for months with Nick Cetrangelo of Northfields, Vermont to design from scratch a type of sander that will be tailored to the work done for the Veterans Affairs' uprights.

"I am really enthused about getting that online," he says.

But ultimately for Martell, it is his crew that makes the difference, regardless of the machinery and technology.

Says Martell, "you're only as good as the people you surround yourself with."