

Knickerbocker likes challenge of Mart roofing job

by Bob Christensen
Associate Editor

"It's the kind of job we like. We look for a challenge," said Christopher Cronin, president of Knickerbocker Roofing & Paving Co. Inc., which is handling the roof rehabilitation for the Merchandise Mart.

With 24 distinct sections covering 170,000 sq. ft., 140,000 sq. ft. of which is being razed

to the original structural system, there's little question the Mart roof qualifies as a challenge.

"They've been putting new roofs on since Marshall Field & Co. built it in 1930," Cronin said. Most areas are three layers deep, consisting of coal tar, insulation and roofing material.

Located on the 16th, 18th, 22nd and 24th

floors are setbacks Cronin said were made of terrazzo and used as patios, which Mart officials decided to roof. "It was too dangerous for people to be out there," Cronin said. No demolition was needed for the setbacks, only installation of insulation and final roofing work.

In the remainder of the roof sections, Knick-

Continued on page 35

Knickerbocker:

Continued from page 33

erbocker's decision to use the ARC Premium system, Cronin said.

"The Merchandise Mart people wanted an F.M. I-90 wind uplift rating and a UL Class A fire retardant rating, but NBC wanted us to find a way to roof that wouldn't disturb their radio or television broadcasts," he said. (The studios of WMAQ-AM 670 and WMAQ-Channel 5, Chicago's NBC affiliates, are located in the building.) The Premium system met all those criteria.

Roofers install the ARC system by running a torch over the bitumen, which melts. It eliminates the need for tar and its cumbersome and noisy pots, Cronin said.

Before installation of the new roof in a given section can begin, however, the old material must be disposed of. Cronin said he accomplishes that task by assigning three crews to the site. The first tears out the old roof material; the second sends it down the Mart's five freight elevators, in covered carts so that no debris escapes to litter the building's interior, and hauls it away to waiting dumpsters. The third crew puts down the new roof. About 16 men from Knickerbocker's staff are working on the Merchandise Mart.

"It works very well," Cronin said. "Part of it is having the right men with the right attitude. This is a noted, highly visible building, and they want to do a professional job."

Cronin said Knickerbocker was invited last September, along with other roofing contractors, to inspect the site and either bid on the architect's design or submit its own, taking NBC's request into consideration. Bids were taken in February, and Knickerbocker began work in July. The company hopes to finish the job by Dec. 1.

Cronin, who represents the fourth generation of his family to run the company, which was started by his great-grandfather and also employees brothers and cousins, estimates that 85 percent of Knickerbocker's business involves re-roofing, as opposed to installing new roofs. "We actively pursue those types of jobs," he said. "It seems to be our strong point. Everybody looks for that specialty, that type of just they do best, and for us, re-roofing seems to be it."