

## REBUILDING THE SHRINE By DAVID WARNSHUIS - Sports Writer for [Iron Mountain Daily News](#)

IRON MOUNTAIN — Originating as Hagemeister Park in 1922, Green Bay's Lambeau Field opened on Sept. 29, 1957, with a seating capacity of 32,150. Today, it stands as the most revered sports venue in the world, according to major sporting news surveys. Living in the era of the new billion-dollar, skybox friendly stadiums, the newly-renovated Lambeau Field is the benchmark on how to create a stadium for today while retaining the heritage of yesterday's heroes.



Iron Mountain's Mike Constantini had no way of knowing when he left Turner Construction in Chicago eight years ago that his would become the latent fingerprints all over the new home of the Packers. "I worked for Turner for more than 15 years," Constantini said. "We stayed in Chicago until 1995 and I just had a belly full of it, I was just tired and wanted to come home."

His father, Bill "Bimbo" Constantini, owned Bimbo's Wine Press and Mike came back to help run the tavern and open his own construction consulting firm. Mike credits his father for getting him started in the building trade almost 30 years ago. "My dad had me help him with houses and apartment complexes, starting my freshman year of high school," Constantini noted. "He really got me started in liking construction."

When Constantini shook off the dust of Chicago to move home for a "better quality of life," he figured he'd never look back.

Guess again. "I got a call from Turner saying they may be getting the Lambeau job," Constantini recalled. "They asked if I would consider coming back and running the project as they needed someone who knew how to build." Excited about the once-in-a-lifetime prospect, he still had to consult his family, as the job would take him away from home for the next three years.

"I had to talk it over with my mom and dad, as the situation involved the family business," Constantini said. "They both said it was a pretty nice opportunity, one too good to pass up." Giving the big "yes" to Turner, Mike was given the title "Director of Field Operations (DFO)," or in essence, "The Man."

"My responsibility was to make sure that everything happened on schedule, on time and on budget," Constantini said. "That's all." Adding to the pressure of the daily management of a \$296 million project, Constantini was very aware of the hallowed ground he was working on. People come from all over the world just to take pictures in front of the stadium. "In today's market, pro sports is show business and so de-centralized from the game," Constantini said. "The Packers still have the original feel of what it's all about. That is what is so great about the organization."

Constantini noted that the organization operates so smoothly that the only way to appreciate the quality of the Green Bay system is to work for them. "I saw it after working for them for three years," Constantini said. "ESPN recently did a survey and they voted the Packers the top organization in all of sports. That is a tremendous honor." With all this in mind, it was up to Constantini to adhere to the strict budget, a tight deadline and find just the right people to work on the project. Turner decided to hire locally.



"We started by finding workers in the Brown County area to come in and help," Constantini said. "We understood exactly just how sensitive the community was and we did our best to make sure everyone in the area did the work."

Most of the prime contractors were from Wisconsin, such as Miron out of Appleton, Selmer out of Green Bay, and Hougard Construction, which originally built the stadium in 1957, along with lead architect Dick “Gus” Gustafson from Iron Mountain (see sidebar story).

There were roughly 60 contractors on board, including Champion Specialty Contractors from Iron Mountain and another local connection with H.J. Martin & Son of Green Bay.

The project manager for Martin & Son — a drywall, glass and glazing company — was another local product, Kevin LaPoint, the son of Dave and Kathy LaPoint of Spread Eagle, Wis. LaPoint re-located to Green Bay from Iron Mountain about the same time that Constantini moved home.

“I was very proud to be involved,” LaPoint said. In fact, LaPoint worked on the very building that will house a tribute to his father, who will be inducted into the Wisconsin High School Football Hall of Fame next year. Dave LaPoint was a highly successful coach at Florence.

Once the crew was in place, Turner Construction, with Constantini at the helm, was faced with the daunting task of having to finish the \$296 million facelift with the resident not moving out.

“We had 33 months to do the job, with the client living, eating, breathing and sleeping there,” Constantini said. “It had never been done before in the NFL, where a stadium was being built around one remaining in use.”

“The irony of this whole thing is I am a big Lions fan, and Mike is a Bears fan.” LaPoint joked. “It’s funny how things work out.”

Groundbreaking on the New Lambeau Field commenced in late February 2001. By fall, the perimeter of the new stadium was up with the old stadium still intact. Other than the minor inconvenience of the construction equipment on the grounds, nothing invasive was done to the existing structure.

That all changed during the winter of 2001-02.

“The day after the San Francisco game on Jan. 15, 2002, we began by demolishing the sky boxes,” Constantini said. “We had to do it in six weeks and that’s a lot of work, especially in the dead of winter.”

The demolition of the old skyboxes left a hole in the stadium between row 60 of the bleachers and the front of the new skyboxes. Instead of filling the hole with more skyboxes, 10,000 seats were added by closing the hole with new bleachers.

The rebuilt stadium now seats 71,500.

Elsewhere, new steel and concrete was added to prepare the new concourse, concessions, toilets and stadium entrances.

“Our company installed the windows, glass, entrances and skyboxes,” LaPoint noted of Martin’s achievements. “We do work throughout the country but this was our crown jewel.”

Also gone was the old “roller coaster” concourse familiar to Lambeau veterans. With the addition of four feet of fill and eight inches of concrete, the new concourse was a smooth freeway in comparison.

“We poured a new concrete apron all around the base of the stadium for people to walk on,” Constantini said. “It was now all on one elevation, which was a vast improvement.”

All that work had to be done before the 2002 season, set to begin in September. To accomplish the work, Constantini had up to 1,200 workers on site during the peak summer building season, working around the clock seven days per week.

Despite being on deadline, Constantini knew it would be a headache having to work as the season started.

“The ‘game day’ logistics of getting 60,000 people into a stadium that is under construction was a true art form,” Constantini said. “We had to get and grab all the confidence we could from the community to get it to work.”

To do that, fans had to have a crash course on the New Lambeau. Where to go, how to get around the equipment, the location of temporary restrooms, new seating and concessions were all spelled out.

“The only way I could really do it was to use graphics and convey things that everyone could understand,” Constantini said. “We even had the temporary layout printed with the ticket packages.”

The first game came off nicely, as 60,000 plus fans stepped their way around cranes, bulldozers, temporary fencing and were amazed at the new layout, even though it was not close to completion. Opening day was a success and as long as Constantini’s crew kept their focus, the 2001 season would be a smooth one.

Then came that sunny Tuesday morning in September 2001.

“We had already done an amazing amount of work making everything comfortable for game days and then Sept. 11 hit,” Constantini noted. “Immediately, all sporting venues could become potential targets and it put a lot of pressure on the construction team.”

Fortunately, the construction equipment that created obstacles for football fans now became their biggest security blanket.

“The construction actually helped the initial situation because it was a perimeter gauntlet for them (terrorists),” Constantini said. “All the trailers, fences and equipment really protected the stadium and helped keep suspicious vehicles at a distance.”

Turner Construction had provided the Packers with unintentional and immediate safety measures, but Constantini and staff went into immediate action to ensure complete, permanent and top-notch security for Packer guests on game day.

“We strategized and put together additional barriers made out of highway concrete barricades to stop automobiles,” Constantini said. “As part of my DFO tag, I was also in charge of game day security from a construction standpoint. We decided to make Lambeau Field as airtight as any stadium could be.”

The security team noted that —while the new construction barricaded the outside — it created a major concern inside. Every new area not yet completed became a hiding place and a potential threat to security.

Constantini worked with the bomb squad on game days, walking with bomb-sniffing dogs all over the stadium to check nooks and crannies.

He would then move up to the press area and help oversee the security procedures that had been put into place by the security team. That procedure is still used today.

“For the past three seasons I was with the Packers in a room up in the press box that they call ‘Stadium Control’ during every game,” Constantini said.

Other members of Stadium Control include the Green Bay commander of police, the fire marshal, and the stadium manager.

“It is standard policy and you’d be amazed just what happens on a Sunday,” Constantini said. “With 70,000 people in there, it is like a small city and they’re not all coming directly from Mass.”

While the safety and welfare of fans had to be addressed, construction also had to continue. Being on a tight budget and timeline, the work plowed forward without a break.

“We didn’t miss a beat as far as construction was concerned,” Constantini noted.

As the next two seasons progressed, fans were finally able to see for themselves what was being done to the stadium and the work was widely praised.

“ I think once they saw it (the old Lambeau) never changed, but everything else around it did for the good, it went over really big,” Constantini noted.

Another task that went largely unnoticed was an enormous one for Constantini's crew. Getting ready for Sunday's guests — the job of shutting everything down in time for game day — was extremely complex.

Cleanup would start on Saturday, with Constantini making sure the right equipment was brought in. He noted that the fencing crews had their work down to a science, moving and putting the barriers into place in a matter of hours.

"By contract, we were supposed to be shut down a day before the game through the day after the game," Constantini said. "We didn't work on Sundays but we were so organized, if the game was on Monday or Thursday night, we could work right up until 2:30 p.m."

The only part that needed extra time was the "national broadcast area."

Constantini noted that when the network television crews came in, their space had to be ready two to three days before game day.

"All of the uplink equipment they would use, new and the old, had to be done," Constantini said. "The network people are very demanding and you had to be on your toes every time you dealt with them."

With the largest single site construction job in the history of the state of Wisconsin signed off and completed on July 31, 2003, the DFO from Iron Mountain could finally relax. The renovation was completed on time — and it was done with an almost impossible-to-believe safety record.

"Our safety record was impeccable. Nobody killed and no major accidents," Constantini said. "I think the worst accident was when someone slipped while getting off his machine and broke his wrist."

Not only had Constantini, Turner and the more than 1,200 workers put up a permanent piece of football architecture, they changed the face of sports construction forever. They had shown for the first time that it was possible to renovate a working NFL stadium.

"I think we showed them a different way of analyzing and managing things from a "big picture" standpoint," Constantini said. "It has become the benchmark of the NFL, as others can now learn how the Packers managed their project and find that they can do the same."

Now that Constantini has had a few months to decompress, what's next for the hottest DFO in the country?

"Turner wanted me to keep working in Chicago," Constantini said. "But I came back to Iron Mountain for quality of life and that's what it's all about."

He did note that the door is still open and that Turner is chasing a couple of jobs now, including the possible renovation of the Orange Bowl in Miami and a downsizing of the Rose Bowl in Los Angeles.

"If I can help out and it's not too taxing on me, that might be another opportunity," Constantini mused. "I don't know, I'll have to wait and see."

