In 2012, Hurricane Sandy inflicted more than $70 billion of damage to homes, roads, businesses, and public buildings across the Northeast. Over six years later, the region is still rebuilding from that natural disaster.

Following the storm, many structures owned by Nassau County in New York were evaluated for structural damage, including the police precincts. Prior to the storm, several of these buildings had already been in need of renovations to accommodate a growing police force and resolve problems of aging infrastructure, and the storm accelerated this need, says Gilbert Balog of LiRo Architects + Planners.

In the 8th District, Nassau County wanted to replace the 1950s-era frame and brick precinct buildings with structures that communicated civic pride and could withstand the onslaughts of future storms. “Resiliency was a major factor in the selection of precast concrete construction,” says Dianne Pohlsander, design architect for LiRo. “In fact, everything came together with precast concrete: resiliency, fabrication that wasn’t weather-dependent, constructability, and the desired aesthetics.”

This project was the third in a series that LiRo designed for Nassau County police. The designs had to embody a consistent visual relationship that linked them to each other as well as the existing public infrastructure. “We wanted to bring the precinct into the 21st century, but also use some of the visual traditions of the county’s other public buildings, to express permanence and dignity,” Pohlsander explains. Precast concrete provided the flexibility to meet the precinct’s budget and durability goals while creating a cohesive architectural message.

Precast concrete also helped address unique logistical challenges on this project. Construction was constrained by a long and narrow site, and, because the new precinct house was constructed at one end while the old building stayed open for operations at the other, the team was under pressure to complete the project quickly and with minimal site disruption. “Precast concrete gave us that quick erection time that we needed,” Pohlsander says.

**AESTHETIC ACHIEVEMENTS**

Aesthetically, the highlight of the new precinct’s design is the heraldic lion of the Nassau County seal, which reinforces the building’s county identity and was cast directly into the precast concrete façade using a computer numerical control-cut foam mold. The façade also features exposed, buff-colored precast concrete panels with an acid-etched finish detail that reflects the traditional building features found in the community. The first-floor panels are set off with a base of polished pink-and-gray Grigio Sardo granite. At the second and third floors, schoolhouse-red and dark manganese iron-spot thin bricks are placed in running bonds and soldier courses to organize the window openings and emphasize small
changes in the plane. “We maximized the three-dimensional plasticity of the concrete surface and used changes of material and brick pattern to enliven the façades,” Pohlsander says.

Inside the structure, the designers use hollow-core slabs with 32-ft spans supported by just six columns to create expansive open-floor areas. Large “punched” windows in the concrete panels provide ample natural lighting, while the wall area between windows allows for flexible placement of interior partitions. “Precast concrete offers simplicity of structural design and functionality in space planning,” Balog notes. “The county and the officers are very happy with what we delivered.”