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SPOTLIGHT



Rigid cores are the rage

The newest offerings in the surging rigid core flooring sector showcase the category's seemingly limitless potential.

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Scan this QR code with your smartphone to link to our featured site.

Wood: State of the industry



Shaw Floors is looking to keep in lockstep with consumer trends toward wider, longer planks. Shown is Epic Plus.

BUILDER BUSINESS, REMODEL SECTOR PROPEL CATEGORY

By Reginald Tucker

Preliminary anecdotal information shows the hardwood flooring category grew between 3% and 4% in 2017, placing the estimated value of the category just north of \$2.31 billion at the first point of distribution. That growth, manufacturer executives say, puts the category on par with the estimated growth of the industry as a whole but slightly above the total gross domestic product for the year.

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U.S.-China tariff tiff troubles some flooring executives

By Ken Ryan

Flooring executives are acting with trepidation amid the escalating trade dispute between the U.S. and China, which ratcheted up a few notches last week when the Trump administration threatened to impose tariffs on some \$50 billion in Chinese imports across 1,300 categories of products.

The imports targeted for 25% levies range from high value-added goods, such as medicines and medical equipment, to intermediate products like machine tools and chemicals as well as durable consumer goods such as dishwashers, TVs and automobile parts. The list also includes machinery used in the production of some flooring products, including carpet and rugs, as well as milling or molding machines for prod-



Flooring executives suggest the latest U.S.-Chinese spat could spur even more onshoring.

announced plans to impose a 25% tariff on \$50 billion worth of U.S. exports. The 106 affected products included soybeans and chemicals and came one day after China announced tariffs on

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FCICA convention

Group membership, participation buck trends

By Ken Ryan

BILOXI, Miss.—Mature associations ordinarily don't see a 25% increase in membership year-over-year after 36 years in business. But these are no ordinary times for the FCICA, the flooring contractors' association,

which has experienced explosive growth on several fronts, as was evidenced at its annual convention here last month.

Total membership climbed to 250 in 2018, up from 201 a year ago, and attendance at the 2018 convention set a new mark, including 78 first-time attendees. But that's not all. FCICA's signature Certified Installation Manager (CIM) program has seen dramatic participatory growth as well, with 65 total certifications now achieved, up from 28 a year ago.

So what gives? "It speaks to commitment of this group," Mike Newberry, chairman of the FCICA, told *FCNews*. "We want



Mike Newberry, chairman of the FCICA, said the association 'stakes our claim' on the CIM program.

sional development. It grew slowly but has now garnered support from outside FCICA. Install, for example, in support of FCICA, funds a \$1,225 scholarship that provides the opportunity for one flooring professional to enroll and successfully complete the CIM training curriculum.

Association members have gotten behind CIM as well. Several large contractors have enrolled multiple individuals to complete the course. Metroflor believed enough in the program that it is funding a CIM scholarship so one contractor could send a candidate through the program. "I

Continued on page 30

to separate ourselves from the competition."

The effort to differentiate starts with the CIM program, which was launched in 2015 to support installation managers' continued training and profes-



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IN THE NEWS

DuChâteau taps Campbell

SAN DIEGO—DuChâteau has appointed Scott Campbell as chief financial officer. Campbell has more than 25 years of developed financial expertise and will be responsible for managing DuChâteau's financial resources as well as leading its strategic investments as part of the organization's growth initiatives.



Campbell's expertise includes cross-functional leadership, strategic planning and execution, contract review and negotiation, as well as planning and managing growth with improved profitability. He previously served as CFO of Road Runner Sports from 1997-2003 and again from 2008 until leaving to join DuChâteau. He was also corporate controller at Patagonia.

Bischoff joins Starnet

DARIEN, CONN.—Starnet Commercial Flooring Co-op has named Mark Bischoff vice president-vendor relations, effective April 1. In this position, Bischoff will manage all activities related to Starnet's Preferred Vendor

network, including vendor acquisition, contract negotiation, business development and training. For the rest of 2018, he will work closely with Fred Williamson, Starnet's executive vice president, who is retiring at the end of 2018.

Bischoff brings 22 years of experience in commercial flooring. He joined Johnsonite as business manager in 1996 and quickly assumed key positions within the organization. After Tarkett's acquisition of Johnsonite in 2009, he was named executive director of strategic partnerships. In 2012, Bischoff became vice president of sales, Tarkett NA. He most recently served as senior vice president of healthcare and senior living for Mohawk Industries.

William M. Bird, Beauflor team up

CHARLESTON, S.C.—William M. Bird will partner with Beauflor to distribute the manufacturer's brand of vinyl flooring in the Southeast. The new product offering will be available throughout William M. Bird's entire territory, including Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee and the Florida panhandle.

"We are proud to partner with Beauflor and align with a manufacturing company that shares our vision and values," said Maybank Hagood, CEO of William M. Bird. "We are very excited to offer our customers high-quality, beautifully designed and profitable new options in vinyl flooring. Our entire team is very impressed with the Beauflor line and we are confident our customers will be as well."

Earlier this year, Armstrong Flooring severed ties with William M. Bird, awarding Bird's territories to Haines, Derr Flooring and Ohio Valley Flooring.



NWFA's online university growing by leaps and bounds

WEB-BASED TRAINING COURSES EDUCATE NOVICE AND PRO INSTALLERS ALIKE

ST. LOUIS—When the National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA) launched its online training program, NWFAU, in the summer of 2016, the group hoped it would expand opportunities for novice and expert installers alike—beyond what was available through its hands-on schools. Well, the program has vastly surpassed the group's expectations as a record number of installers are signing up for online training.

By its last count, more than 20,000 courses have been completed by more than 4,800 users since July 2016, with an average of 42 courses completed per day. In the first year alone, in fact, more than 15,000 online courses were completed.

"The engagement with our online learning platform has been overwhelming," said Stephanie Owen, NWFA education and member engagement director. "That's just an amazing level of participation."

The success of NWFA's online university is garnering attention outside the flooring industry. The program recently received an award in the 2017 Association



NWFA's online training program, NWFAU, supplements its hands-on educational classes.

Trends All Media Contest, specifically the gold award in the e-Learning & Live Training category. This category recog-

nizes associations that have successfully implemented an online learning platform.

"We're really proud of the platform we've built and the number of people we've been able to reach in under two years," Owen said.

Prior to that, NWFA won a 2017 Association Trends Learniest award for the Biggest Success Story for establishing NWFA University. The Learniest recognizes organizations that have pioneered a new way of learning to benefit their members. The award for Biggest Success Story recognizes an association that grew revenue, membership or brand awareness by implementing a new learning program.

A distinctive approach

One thing that differentiates NWFAU from typical online learning platforms is the incorporation of digital badges—a graphic representation of a learned skill. NWFA takes it a step further by embedding its digital badges with metadata that

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American Olean helps distributors set up shop

DALLAS—American Olean, part of the Mohawk family, is looking to help its distributor partners expand into new territories via the development of turnkey stores. These new facilities, built by Mohawk, are part of a value-added service whereby American Olean executes all of the up-front financing and legwork to site survey, manage construction and build out the interior of a new store that will feature American Olean as its anchor brand.

"Our ongoing mission is to equip our distributors for success with the American Olean brand," said Hector Narvaez, vice president of distributor sales for American Olean. "Our turnkey, value-added service is a powerful tool to help distributors increase their revenue. And the best part about it is American Olean does all the heavy lifting for them."

Once the doors are ready to be opened

for business, American Olean hands the keys over to its distributor, Narvaez explained. The eventual cost to the distributor through an easy payment plan is



Travis Tile recently celebrated the grand opening of its new showroom in McAllen, Texas.

much more doable than shouldering the burden of up-front construction costs and the risk of a new business venture alone.

American Olean's turnkey showroom

is designed to offer a complete American Olean shopping experience for customers and clients. Displays in each store showcase the entire American Olean product line. In addition, the overall layout of each store incorporates today's most studied principles on how consumers shop and what overall shopping experience most effectively guides consumers through the consideration and selection process, according to Narvaez.

Travis Tile, the latest American Olean distributor to take advantage of this opportunity, recently celebrated the grand opening of its new Travis Tile showroom in McAllen, Texas. "American Olean is serving as the ultimate strategic ally, offering distributors an easy way to substantially increase their revenue stream by expanding into new markets via American Olean's turnkey showroom opportunities," said Jamie Tyler of Travis Tile, which has been an American Olean distributor for the past 32 years.

SNAPSHOT

Carpetland USA of Roanoke earns top retailer award

TUCSON, ARIZ.—Carpetland USA of Roanoke, Va., was named the 2017 Carpetland Retailer of the Year during the recent Alliance Flooring annual convention here. Accepting the award is Gene Podell, owner. He is joined to his immediate left by Tom Peeters, vice president, and Alliance executives, from left, Ryan Dunn, Ron Dunn, Jon Logue and Kevin Logue.





my take

Learning a little more about millennials

Whatever and wherever you read, it's hard to escape the word "millennial." Retailers across all industries are continuing to increase their focus on selling to this generation, ages 23-37, who are rising in the ranks at work, getting married and having kids. They are playing a significant role in shaping our nation's economic landscape. While baby boomers still control the lion's share of disposable income and remain the flooring industry's best customer today, it would be unwise to turn a blind eye on your most important customer of tomorrow.

When you hear the word millennial, it may call to mind some stereotypes: self-absorbed, foolish with money, not long-term planners or still dependent on their parents. But these stereotypes really don't hold up, according to a recent Bank of America study titled, Better Money Habits Millennial Report.

As it turns out, millennials are actually just as good, or better, than other generations when it comes to managing money, and they are getting their financial houses in order. Millennials are more likely to set savings goals, and a majority meet them. One in six has at least \$100,000 saved in checking and savings accounts, IRAs, 401(k)s and other retirement or investment accounts. Millennials with \$15,000 or more in savings jumped to nearly 50% this year in the Bank of America study. Most millennials feel financially secure,

yet one in four often worry about money.

At home, millennial parents are very aware of the costs of raising children. Older generations say finances weren't really a factor in their decision to have kids; millennial parents say the opposite. What's more, nearly a quarter of older millennials are already saving for their children's education—quite a feat given that so many may still be paying off their own student loans.

Millennials were somewhere between middle school and just starting their careers during the economic collapse in 2007. And that has had some profound impacts on the way they save. Two-thirds of affluent millennials say they plan to rely on their savings accounts when they retire. Meanwhile, seven in 10 Gen-Xers have been relying on 401(k)s, and the majority of boomers chose to rely on Social Security and pensions.

So, with millennials representing a rising share of the U.S. consumer base, how do you reach them? First, in marketing to millennials, remember they have less disposable income than past generations. They've learned how to live well on less, and that makes their shopping habits much different from their predecessors.

The millennial generation knows how to take advantage of technology to get the best quality for the best price. They're adept at finding discounts, using

coupons and getting free shipping.

Branding is important to millennials, but price sometimes overshadows it. Millennials consider options carefully before they're willing to spend their money. They're not likely to buy into flashy, self-promotional ads.

Millennials are an entrepreneurial population that takes delight in supporting local businesses. They've also been brought up learning about things like global warming and preserving natural resources. Businesses that actively support and promote a greener economy will get millennials' attention.

Millennials won't be caught without multiple mobile devices, so marketers need to ensure their ads are "responsive," meaning they display clearly on all mobile devices. Digital marketers will find greater power in social media because most millennials pull it up before they brush their teeth in the morning.

Again, while the baby boomer is still your most important customer, it's critical to understand the ins and outs of this generation if you plan on sticking around for the next couple of decades. When you learn what makes a new generation tick, it's far easier to evolve your marketing strategy to ignite a spark that gets them to click.

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Getting social with fcnews

Hall of Fame calls Chapman as its 48th inductee

DALTON—Harold Chapman, former president of Bonitz Flooring Group, the nation's largest independent commercial flooring company, is the latest inductee to the World Flooring Covering Association Hall of Fame. A pioneering retailer and entrepreneur throughout his career, he becomes the 48th person to receive the prestigious honor.

Chapman has spent his entire professional life in the flooring industry. After graduating from Clemson University in South Carolina, his first job was as a salesman for Sears in the commercial division in Anderson, S.C. He was promoted to division sales manager for the entire state before he even hit his two-year anniversary with the company.

After getting his feet wet in the field, Chapman's next notable accomplishment occurred after he joined Bonitz Flooring Group in Greenville, S.C., where he still resides. At that time, he was the only flooring salesperson in the city. As the sole practitioner, his role included conducting all estimates, sales and project management company-wide. Within a year, he was promoted to manager and became officer of the company within his first five years.

Shortly thereafter, Chapman rose to the position of president and CEO at Bonitz Flooring Group, a company he grew to become the behemoth that it is today. There he was responsible for providing the corporate vision and leading the employee-owned company. Besides his skill set for management, sales, sales training and marketing strategies, his associates recognized him for his mentoring and life-skills teaching. Chapman retired from Bonitz Flooring Group in 2016.

"Harold epitomizes all that the Hall of Fame stands for," said Scott Humphrey, CEO of the WFCA. "He has achieved this honor for his continual contributions and achievements throughout his career."

History of service

Today, Chapman serves as chairman emeritus at Starnet Commercial Flooring Co-op. A former chairman of Starnet's board of directors, he served as chairman for five years of the co-op during the vertical integration days and helped re-establish Starnet as a successful entity for the independent flooring contractor. His dedication

and vision still play an important role as Starnet continues to prosper.

Chapman's contributions to the industry don't end there. The International Interior Design Association (IIDA), during its inaugural Hall of Fame induction in 2000, honored Chapman for his dedication and support of the commercial design community.

Chapman is also a former member of the board of directors for the Floor Covering Installation Board, whose directors came directly from the

Floor Covering Installation Contractors Association membership. Chapman also served on many advisory boards during his 35-year career, including DuPont and BASF, among others. He is a past board member for the Carolina's Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation. His leadership and insight contributed directly to the chapter's early success.

Chapman's involvement with the WFCA began when Bonitz Flooring Group became a member in 1998. He was elected to the WFCA board for

the first time in 2002. During his first years as a board member, Chapman served on the WFCA finance and executive committees as well as several others. He was elected again as chairman of the WFCA board in 2012 and continued to hold board and committee seats with the association.

Chapman will be inducted in the Hall of Fame at a special reception and ceremony in conjunction with the WFCA annual meeting and board of directors meeting in Orlando, Fla., on May 17, 2018.



Harold Chapman

As a business owner, we are peppered every day with proposals. The ones that stand out are those that have the highest return on investment. From installation training to sales training, financial benchmarking to key service discounts, and legislative alerts to legal perspectives, a WFCA membership returns a lot for a small investment.

*- Keith Campbell
Mannington Mills, Inc.*



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Turning browsers into buyers

BY LISBETH CALANDRINO

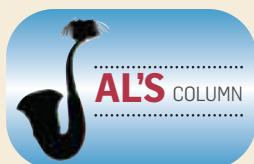
In this modern age of digital marketing, it's critical retailers move beyond the traditional means of targeting consumers. Don't get me wrong; I'm not suggesting dealers completely abandon tried-and-true methods of marketing to new and existing customers. Rather, they should seize all available opportunities—along with the host of online marketing tools available—to turn browsers into buyers.

According to Salesforce Marketing Cloud, a provider of digital marketing automation and analytics software and services, 70% of people say they always open emails from their favorite companies. MarketingSherpa, a firm specializing in tracking what works in all aspects of marketing, reported 61% of shoppers say they like to receive promotional emails weekly; meanwhile, 29% said they want to receive them more frequently.

If you are unsure how to employ online marketing tools in your business, the following are a few tips to get the ball rolling.

Develop a plan of attack. Most businesses only focus on their advertising efforts when they have something special to promote. However, an email marketing campaign should be about more than just promotions. It should give your customers useful information they can use throughout the year. It's also a good idea to build email campaigns around holidays, special occasions and important events.

Know your customer. This might sound rudimentary, but do you really know "who's who" in your database? Your customers may include property managers, builders, architects and homeowners. Should they all receive the same email message? Certainly not. According to the Lyris Annual Email Optimizer Report, companies using email list segmentation saw 39% high-



AL'S COLUMN



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er open rates and 28% lower unsubscribe rates. Put another way, if you met 50 people at a networking group you wouldn't say the same things to each person, would you?

Devise compelling subject lines. You don't have to be a wordsmith to excel in this area; just think creatively. For instance, if you want your customer to know something, tell her what it is in the subject line and then give her the full story in the email body. Oftentimes the content has nothing to do with the subject line. A great subject line can spark interest, but if the content isn't relevant, the customer will stop opening your emails.

All customers are not created equal. When you create your campaign, you need to segment your customers. The customer who has bought from you is different from the one who hasn't yet made a purchase. Don't treat them the same. Target each group and send them relevant messages.

Let's say you meet 40 new people at a networking event and put them in with the rest of the people in your database. Since you don't know these customers, you don't want to treat them as if you do. Rather, know that this is a special group that you want to get to know so they will see your information as useful and want to keep hearing from you. Once you gain their trust and they recognize your brand, you can begin to send them offers.

The trick is not to get overwhelmed or overthink things. Think about emails, alerts and messages you receive from some of the places you shop, and try to emulate the ones that inspire you or compel you to act. And if you're not comfortable in tackling this yourself, by all means assign someone on your staff—maybe a millennial?—who's more familiar with the technology and various media.

Lisbeth Calandrino has been promoting retail strategies for the last 20 years. To have her speak at your business or to schedule a consultation, contact her at lcalandrino@nycap.rr.com.

RETAILERS REACT

How would you assess your first quarter? Any surprises?



Despite a tough winter for some, retailers turned in strong results for the first quarter.

“Our first quarter has been very strong. I think the biggest surprise is we have had a rough winter, particularly in March, but it hasn't seemed to slow us down, which is a great sign. Hopefully this will carry over to the rest of the year.”

—A.J. Boyajian, A.J. Rose Carpets & Flooring
Burlington, Mass.

“Our overall business is up nearly 10% year over year. Our builder business is a key driver of that growth. In addition, our retail business continues to be strong after a record year for us last year in that category. We have yet to see any negative impact from the stock market volatility

the last 60 days, which is a bit surprising”

—Craig Phillips, Barrington Carpet & Flooring Design, Akron, Ohio

“First quarter has been really good—easily manageable, I'd say. The mild winter of 2018 has made our ability to fulfill the needs of both residential and commercial contractors at the same time as our retail work. Compared to 2017, in which the weather delayed everything nearly three months, the weather this year has made everything from sales to product fulfillment to installation much more manageable and much less stressful.”

—Casey Dillabaugh, Dillabaugh's Flooring America
Boise, Idaho

“Here in the Midwest (Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri), it has been a pretty good first quarter. During every month, it seems like a struggle and we aren't going to hit last year's numbers. But then something good happens and—wow—we exceeded last year's numbers. January started off strong, then slowed. February started slow, then built at the end. March started off good, slowed in the middle and here, at the end, we have a great push.”

—Paul Johnson, Johnson Floor & Home Carpet One
Tulsa, Okla.

POINTS OF INTEREST

► **Good news** for flooring retailers who rely on the residential remodel business: According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, homeowner spending on improvements and repairs is expected to reach \$340 billion in 2018, which is up 7.5% from 2017. Experts say that low housing supply and high costs are prompting many homeowners to remodel their current home rather than buy a new one. Rising interest rates and changes to mortgage-related tax credits are also impacting their decisions. “This is a housing repair and remodeling story—and not just because of the recent hurricanes and fires,” Diane Swonk, chief economist at professional services firm

Grant Thornton, told *The Washington Post*. “In many cases, people are realizing it's cheaper and easier to add on to their homes than to buy new ones.”



► **In today's job market**, candidates have all the leverage, according to Benchmarking, a recruiting firm that services the flooring industry. “If you get a candidate, chances are they are interviewing with multiple other companies, so you need to sell yourself and company to them,” said Jessica Gonzalez, vice president. Employee retention is also critical, according to Brad Cotlar, principal, who noted, “The old adage ‘hire slow and fire fast’ has changed to ‘hire fast and fire slow.’”

► **Flooring dealers often** cite the importance of consumer confidence for their business. Well, there is positive news on that front as the University of Michigan reported that its consumer sentiment index rose in March to the highest level since 2004, when the economy was recovering from the burst dot-com bubble. The reading of 101.4 for the month was up 1.7% from 99.7 in February. All of the March gain was attributed to households with incomes in the bottom third, while sentiment for those in the middle third was unchanged. Sentiment dropped among households in the top third. “Consumers remain confident in their future job and income prospects,” Richard Curtin, director of the University of Michigan surveys, said in a news release.

April 9-10
Haines Loyalty Club Northern Summit Annual conference and trade show, Sheraton Charlotte Hotel, Charlotte, N.C. Contact: Libby Horne, 410.762.5665; lhorne@jjhaines.com; charlotte.hainesloyaltyclub.com

April 11-14
NWFA Wood Flooring Expo Annual convention, Tampa Convention Center, Tampa, Fla. Contact: 800.422.4556; nwfaexpo.org

April 16
CFI Residential Carpet 5-week course, Forney, Texas. Contact: John McHale, 816.231.4646; jmcchale@cfinstallers.org; cfinstallers.org

April 18-22
FCA Network 20th anniversary celebration, Marriott Puerto Vallarta Resort & Spa, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Contact: Adriana Mrizek, 779.234.9533; amrizek@fcanetwork.com; fcanetwork.com

April 19-22
Starnet Commercial Flooring Cooperative Spring member meeting, Omni Orlando Resort, Champions Gate, Fla. Contact: Rob Starr, 888.239.8675, ext. 7; rob@starnetflooring.com; starnetflooring.com/commercial-flooring-news/events/

April 24-26
NWFA Basic Installation Three-day introductory course, New York. Hosted by NYC Dist. Council of Carpenters Contact: Tricia Swindoll, 800.422.4556; tricia.swindoll@nwfa.org

May 8-9
CFI Ceramic Certification Two-day course, Forney, Texas. Contact: John McHale, 816.231.4646; jmcchale@cfinstallers.org; cfinstallers.org

May 8-11
Coverings Annual trade show, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta. Contact: 800.424.5249; coverings.com/register

May 9
CARE (Carpet America Recovery Effort) 16th annual conference, Orlando Convention Center, Orlando, Fla. Contact: 706.428.2127; carpetrecovery.org



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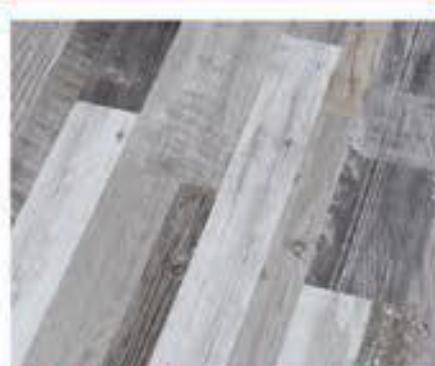
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NRF's Leah Ledoux, left, VP of corporate commercial strategy, and Terry Gray, senior VP of marketing, welcomed dealers.



Pedro Tavares, left, CEO of Ribadao Wood Boutique, and Bruce Hammer, vice president of sales, showcasing new exotic hardwood flooring products.



American Olean's Ray Pina, left, regional sales manager, Northeast, and Mike Lewandowski, general manager, were pleased with the response.

NRF prioritizes service for partners at NEFM

By Steven Feldman & Mara Bollettieri

UNCASVILLE, CONN.—Winter turned to spring on March 19 as things were heating up at NRF Distributors' New England Flooring Market (NEFM). With 110 vendors showcasing their latest wares to an estimated 320 customers, Terry Gray, vice president of marketing, was anticipating the one-day event to generate \$3 million in business. Every vendor offered some type of special to encourage retailers to make the trip to NEFM and spend.

"This is their local Surfaces," Gray told FCNews. By her count, only 10 retailers who signed up for the NEFM attended Surfaces. "Instead of flying to Vegas and spending all that money, they can spend a night here and buy new displays and meet executives of the brands they sell."

The NEFM concept began nearly 40 years ago, when it was held in NRF's Augusta, Maine-based warehouse. The market eventually outgrew the venue and has been held in casinos for the last 10 years, attracting customers from Maine to Pennsylvania. NRF now hosts three markets a year for its customers—two in Connecticut and one in New York.

One initiative the distributor was focusing on at this event was its newly launched social media platform, NRF Social, which aims to help retail customers build their Facebook and Twitter presence. Michael Gallicchio, social media manager of NRF Social, explained how the program familiarizes itself with the retailer and adapts to his or her specific community and product line. This allows the program to produce a library of personalized content. "What we try to do is engage the community through social media in the name of the retailer and target people who are showing the tendency toward

home improvement services. Once we do that, more than likely when people go to buy flooring, they're going to be thinking about the local retailers first."

The program costs anywhere from \$99-\$149 a month depending on the level of service. Ninety-nine bucks a month includes posting content and pictures; for \$149 a month, retailers receive content plus paid Facebook ads. Gallicchio emphasized how putting money behind Facebook advertising can be extremely beneficial to a retailer's business. "For hardly any money, comparatively speaking to what existed 20 years ago—when people spent thousands of dollars in ads—you can deliver a branded message with pictures, specs and product knowledge that will help people make decisions on the fly."

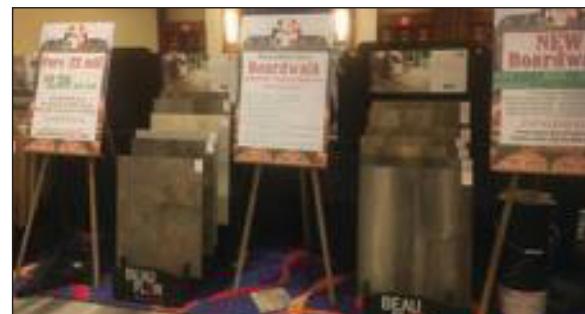
Around 30 to 40 stores have signed on to NRF Social since its launch in October, and at least a dozen more were added at the show, Gallicchio shared. "NRF had the foresight to not guess what consumers do. We studied it." The platform allows retailers to maximize their time on the floor with customers while the social media experts handle the advertising.

NRF's social media team held a four-month pilot program, where it tested numerous types of messaging and online advertising through social media platforms. The data collected from this study revealed what consumers best respond to so a local retailer can hyper-locally target consumers in his or her community.

NRF has also launched a campaign promoting the "shop local" movement with service, honesty, options and pricing providing the basis for the acronym SHOP. NRF has adorned the back door

of its 68 trucks with the signage and is also providing POP material in the form of stickers to retailers. "The idea is to get people to buy specialty flooring products from their local retailer," Gray said. "It's a way to drive more traffic into stores. We are driving the fact local stores do it better."

NRF is also using its trucks to promote its vendors. For example, 28 trucks sport the Tarkett logo and a large room scene visual plastered on the side. "We've been doing that since 1988," Gray said. "We don't know of any other distributor doing that. It's the best advertising you can get. That



Beauflor, one of NRF's newer vendors, displayed its latest LVT line.

will last 12 years; the trailer will die before the label comes off."

Gray noted that NRF was up about 6% in 2017 and, like just about everyone, is riding the crest of the LVT/WPC/SPC wave. Beauflor and Raskin are new vendors joining Tarkett, which NRF has handled for five years. "Actually, the last two or three years have been great," Gray said.

That is not to say NRF is strictly growing because of hard surface. Gray pointed out that carpet is still a big part of the distributor's overall sales. "Carpet remains 30% of our business. I have carpet in stock all the time."

Service with a smile

Service has been, and always will be, something Gray believes is an NRF hallmark. "Truck drivers deliver to every single store twice a week—roll goods, boxed goods,

palletized goods. Generally speaking, customers never have to wait more than a week for anything. We even have 400 customers who have given the truck drivers keys to their stores, so they can deliver early in the morning. Sometimes we even start the coffee maker."

Delivery of product begins long before NRF drivers show up on a retailer's doorstep. In many cases, product comes from overseas, which requires astute management to ensure proper inventory. "If you are buying containers from China, you must factor in how many weeks and months it takes to get product," Gray noted. "You need 15 to 18 weeks inventory if it's coming on a container. You have to have a purchasing system for all the different items. You have to factor in all the nuances of each product lines."

Retailers attending the NEFM attested to NRF's focus on service. Jeff Hosking, owner of

Payless Floors, North Attleborough, Mass., shared the advantages of using the distributor for his local business. "The pricing is better when you buy it in bulk, and they're great people to deal with. We've worked with them now for a lot of years, and we've found them to be very honest when we have an issue. They back up what they say. They help us sell our customers with product knowledge and offer training."

When asked what separates NRF from other distributors, Hosking did not hesitate to respond. "They're more attentive. The service is 100% better than most of the other distributors."

Even retailers who are new to the game are impressed with the service NRF provides. Eileen Nash and her husband, Dylan O'Malley-Joyce, recently opened

The Floor Works in Bethlehem, N.H. She shared how they recently had a problem with some of their flooring and NRF resolved the issue. "The manufacturer blamed the installer, so NRF got us an inspector. It turned out to be a flooring defect, and NRF had everything fixed [just] like that."

As an added bonus, NRF has a printing department and another that handles sampling for wood and ceramic. NRF also offers its customers products to sell on a private-label basis. "We always thought it was important for customers to have their own lines," Gray said. "Everyone can go on their phones and say, 'I can buy it cheaper.' But private-label products can't be shopped."

Manufacturers also attest to the value NRF provides. "They're just efficient," said Stephan Guindon, executive director, NA, Venture Carpet. "The reputation they've built in the marketplace is something I haven't seen in other areas of the country."

If reputation is No. 1, then product knowledge is a close second. Bruce Hammer, vice president of sales at Ribadao Wood Boutique, was one who commended the distributor's familiarity of his products. "They have an extremely knowledgeable sales staff that can talk in depth about the unique species we offer."

Raskin Industries is a relatively new supplier, only four months into the relationship. "I would say they dominate New England more than any other distributor dominates their own marketplace," said Ted Rocha, vice president of sales. He likened his partnership with NRF to being a part of an extended family. "They have great support from areas that are very difficult to get to."

Mike Lewandowski, general manager of American Olean, is also pleased with NRF as a distributor partner. "They support all our new launches and every effort we do in the market."



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Rigid core continues to set new standards

By Ken Ryan

Even seasoned flooring executives are stunned at the growth of the rigid core subsegment that burst onto the scene less than two years ago and has morphed into a super cell of flooring.

Jimmy Tuley, vice president, residential resilient business, Mannington, just returned from Domotex Asia where he saw scores of new entries. "We saw combinations of wood on rigid core; some with mineral core to give it different properties... there is a lot of innovation happening. The pace of change right now is just amazing, unbelievable really."

Jeff Francis, resilient category manager, Shaw

Industries, and a 14-year industry veteran, added, "The rate of change in resilient rigid core is so significant it is challenging just to stay ahead of the pace. Based on the velocity of growth, I don't see it receding at all."

Francis said he sees rigid core continuing to take market share from soft surface as well as hard surface—laminate, wood and even glue-down LVT. "We see growth accelerating, and in the next 12-24 months, even as fast as the innovation is coming, we see more of it."

David Sheehan, senior vice president, product management, Mohawk resilient, said he has been "astounded" by the growth of rigid vinyl. "It is definitely a product that has become the darling of the industry. Just as LVT in general was the go-to product for RSAs and deal-

ers, rigid has become that go-to product."

Rigid core, or SPC (solid polymer core), is made of a composite core construction, a step up from solid LVT, with a higher filler content and higher density without any foaming agent creating air bubbles in the core. The result is a thinner, harder and stiffer plank. Rigid core products are primarily suitable where higher indentation resistance is required and extensive exposure to sunlight/heat can occur.

This broad definition does not stop flooring companies from putting their own marketing spin on their iterations.

Following is a look at some of the newest offerings in rigid core flooring.



Armstrong

Rigid Core Vantage from Armstrong Flooring includes such features as registered embossing in elongated 9 x 60 and 7 x 60 planks and accentuated painted bevels. The line comes with a commercial-specified 20-mil wear layer and urethane coating, and is noted for its dent resistance thanks to a solid polymer core. Vantage is supported by a premium natural cork underlayment for reduced sound transmission. Armstrong said installing Rigid Core Vantage has been made easier with a new drop-lock system. It has been tested for use in fully enclosed three-season rooms where the expected post-installation temperature range falls between 32°F and 100°F. Rigid Core Vantage will be available to retailers in June.

CFL/FirmFit

FirmFit XXL boasts long and wide planks featuring synchronized embossed-in-register technology. "FirmFit was one of the first to launch long and wide rigid core planks that feature an extremely realistic embossed and register synchronized texture in a large way," said Thomas Baert, CFL president. "The rigid core category is moving forward extremely fast and improving style and designs, which is bringing the category closer to

real wood looks and textures. FirmFit XXL is the next step."

FirmFit XXL, which will be in stores early summer, is backed by warranties on performance on massive installation surfaces without use of transition moldings. It is dent resistant and sun proof.

Congoleum

Triversa's triple-layer construction delivers exceptional durability with a 20 mil wear layer, stability through a waterproof



rigid core and versatility with cork backing for sound mitigation. A SmartLock clic system allows for easy floating installations. Triversa ID offers extensive design options, including mixed-width woods, longer planks, enhanced edge treatments and tile visuals.



Dixie Group

Dixie is one of the newest entrants into the rigid core space but is determined to make a lasting impression, according to Dan Phelan, vice president of marketing and hard surfaces. For 2018, the Dixie Home and Masland brands are coming out with 16 new offerings, all Stainmaster PetProtect with action traction. "We are filling in some gaps in colorations,"

Phelan said. "We have fashion-forward colors in gray and taupe, and we are now adding heavier distressed looks." New size options in Dixie Home (7 x 60) and Masland (5 x 60) are in addition to a 9 x 60 offered by both. Masland's Big Sky line offers a 28-mil wear layer.

What's different here is the company's path to market is through limited retail distribution. As Phelan explained, "Do you want to enter the market for the sake of entering, or do you want to enter with something special? Stainmaster adds to our position in the marketplace. It's working for us, and our limited distribution model is very powerful. We're off to a really good start."



EarthWerks

Noble Classic Plus SPC from EarthWerks boasts an array of high-dimension oak patterns with EIR. The assortment comes in 8 x 48 planks as well as a 9.5 x 60 tile for an even more dramatic appearance—each with cushion backing.

For customers looking for a glue-down application, these same designs and sizes are also available in a 3mm x 20 mil dry back version called Wood Classic II.

Inhaus

Sono is Inhaus' latest innovation in waterproof dimensionally stable flooring. The German-made product comes with proprietary technology and features high-definition digital printing. The printing process enables vastly improved color variations and a 5% plank repeat, the company said, resulting in a uniquely appeal-



ing installation. The core is highly resistant to heat and cold, is waterproof and has an angle fold locking system for ease of installation. The patented ceramic composite core is free of PVCs, formaldehyde and all other additives.



IVC

Urbane, which will be launched in the second quarter through distribution, will be part of IVC's rebranded Waterproof Solutions display, which replaces Moduleo. Sheehan explained the company is trying to communicate the inherent waterproof nature of the offerings with the three-product display that also includes Horizon and Embellish. Described as a classic flexible offering, Horizon is a 20 mil, 4.5mm construction available in click and glue down. The trade up is Embellish, a flexible LVT that Sheehan called a very significant offering. "We're not labeling the products, we're creating a good/better/best trade-up story," he said.

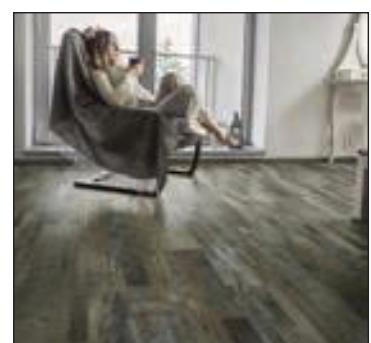
Urbane is a rigid offering that IVC expects will drive a lot

of traffic and enthusiasm. Glass is used to make the product more dimensionally stable. All three products are suitable for three-season rooms capable of handling extreme temperatures.



Mannington

Tuley said he sees the WPC and SPC segments "splitting" as new technologies emerge to create separation. AduraMax Prime is an SPC targeted at the builder/multifamily segment. AduraMax Apex offers a long and wide plank and is embossed with a painted bevel. Mannington also plans to launch Adura Rigid, an SPC with pad attached. "For the most part, these products are variations or improvements on LVT to solve very particular problems," Tuley said.



Marquis

Marquis' newest rigid core product offering, Geneva, provides a print with great color movement and depth. Featuring multi-width look patterns representing a new urban twist to a rustic look, Geneva comes in a 7 x 48 board with a 4mm SPC

Continued on page 12



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Canyon Oak



Villa Bronze

Rigid core

Continued from page 10

core and 20 mil ceramic bead wear layer finished with a 1.5mm closed-cell IXPE attached cushion.



Metroflor

Engage Inception, Metroflor's new SPC product, expands the company's portfolio of LVT flooring solutions that address all relevant categories—glue down and a variety of floating platforms such as Grip-Strip (Konecto), Solid Vinyl Clic (Engage), WPC (Engage Genesis) and now SPC (Engage Inception).

The new Engage Inception line is intended to serve as an entry-level, SPC product suit-

able for multifamily, residential and commercial environments dependent on the wear layer chosen. It is stiffer and denser than WPC, offering favorable dimensional stability characteristics, thereby enabling greater resistance to temperature changes and indentations. Beyond improved dent resistance, the premium attached high-density polyethylene foam underlayment provides sound absorption, reduces transmitted sound and foot fatigue and helps to conceal subfloor imperfections.



Mohawk

2018 promises to be a big year for Mohawk in the area of rigid core. Starting with SolidTech, its flagship line with less than one full year in the market, Mohawk is readying a slew of new rigid offerings from its U.S. production facility that will be a fully integrated rigid core plant.

"Customers are getting in line for this," Sheehan said. "Mohawk has invested a huge amount of capital toward this category. We feel we have the right products and are positioned well in each of our channels."

Due out soon is True Design, a collection of neat visuals with features such as EIR, painted bevels and longer planks. Within the collection, Blended Tones boasts a 22 mil wear layer with a painted bevel. "The reason we do embossed in register is not to prove to the market that we can do it, but to make the product look real," Sheehan explained. "We feel we have done that with the True Design collection."

Both the second and third quarters will be active for Mohawk as it aggressively expands its rigid portfolio. As Sheehan explained, "If rigid is the fastest growing segment, the only way to keep pace and grow your market share is to aggressively invest in your category. We are going to aggressively expand our offering and grab market share with the right product along with the right visuals and price points."



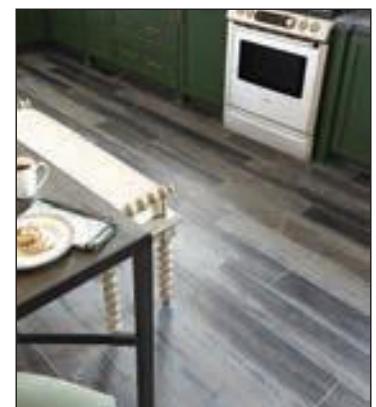
Karndean

Korlok Select, the company's rigid core line, took two years to develop but was worth the wait, according to Emil Mellow, director of public relations. "Everything we put in there is top end."

Korlok's rigid core line comes fully equipped with K-Core technology, a pre-attached acoustic underlayment, K-Guard+ surface protection, HoldFast 5G locking mechanism and warranty. Its 9 x 56 plank matches that of other suppliers. "We found that anything longer than that logically doesn't work for a couple of reasons," Mellow stated. "The box size becomes too heavy and unwieldy to handle, the retail shelf bins are not big enough to accommodate the planks, and the installation becomes very difficult. You need two people and that defeats the whole pur-

pose of easy assembly."

While most companies, including Karndean, attach numerous bells and whistles to their rigid core products, occasionally they dial back the features to hit a desired price point. That was the case with the Reserve line, which comes out in May. It launches with a stacker option or waterfall display for dealers.



Novalis

Its newest rigid core product, Serenbe, is part of the NovaFloor line with high density core (HDC) technology. It has 24 styles in planks and tiles—including a new 12 x 36 tile. Serenbe also features Novalis' newest advancement in protection, patent-pending

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NovaFloor HDC is an extruded solid vinyl that provides all the popular attributes of rigid core: waterproof, dent resistance and ease of installation over common subfloor imperfections. "We equipped it with an attached foam underlayment as a sound barrier and added comfort underfoot," said Steve Erlich, vice president of sales and marketing. "So, if you're a dealer, you will want this product line on your retail floor. It's the whole package."



Phenix

Bold Statement from Phenix is a Stainmaster PetProtect SPC in seven colors, five planks and two tile options. Velocity is a 9 x 60 SPC rigid core that combines Corex technology with an EVA foam backing to eliminate additional underlayment. "Both products have some unique features and benefits," said Chris Johnson, senior vice president of sales. "Our Bold Statement is [among] the only PetProtect SPCs on the market. It also has the Stainmaster PetProtect finish so it provides superior scratch resistance and pet action traction."

Velocity is a 22 mil product that is extra wide and long but is also available in a 12 x 24 tile. "We have worked hard to develop a rich and diverse color palette for both products, so just about any home can find something within Velocity that fits their space," Johnson said.



Quick-Step

EnduraTek and EnduraTek Ultra, the company's newest rigid core offerings, will be sold through distribution. These unique tile visuals are constructed of an internally routed grout line that renders the product incredibly real, according to the company. "It gives the visual appearance of a 12 x 24, when in

fact it is a 12 x 48 plank." EnduraTek Ultra is slated for the second quarter. "We have rigid flowing everywhere," Sheehan said.

Raskin

Raskin Industries is promoting its eight-layer rigid construction in which each layer is engineered to provide more stability. "It's the best of both worlds—waterproof rigid with no air or foam, and no adhesives since we fuse the layers as we use heat and pressure," said Michael Raskin, president. "It's critical to have multiple layers."

A new product, Solid Gencore, is made from Raskin's



proprietary acrylic composite structure used as its core layer to provide maximum stability and impact resistance. "Acrylx has no foam or air, making it denser than a WPC-type multi-layer product. We use advanced technology-grade resins that are used specifically to provide sta-

bility against heat and cold temperatures."

New to the market is Acrylx Select, available in five colors. The line is meant to be price competitive with the added benefits of soundproof backing and anti-mildew. It is 100% waterproof as well. Lumination Velocity, another new offering, will have 10 colors in a 4mm with a 1mm Gcore backing. This collection will include registered embossing and will be showcased in a new display with large boards. The line consists of stone, multi-plank looks and 60-inch planks. "It's hard to differentiate, so it's important to sell the latest and best technolo-

gy that will stand up to the hype," Raskin said. "We feel our product construction and ability to design the colors and styles that sell will offer customers the right products."

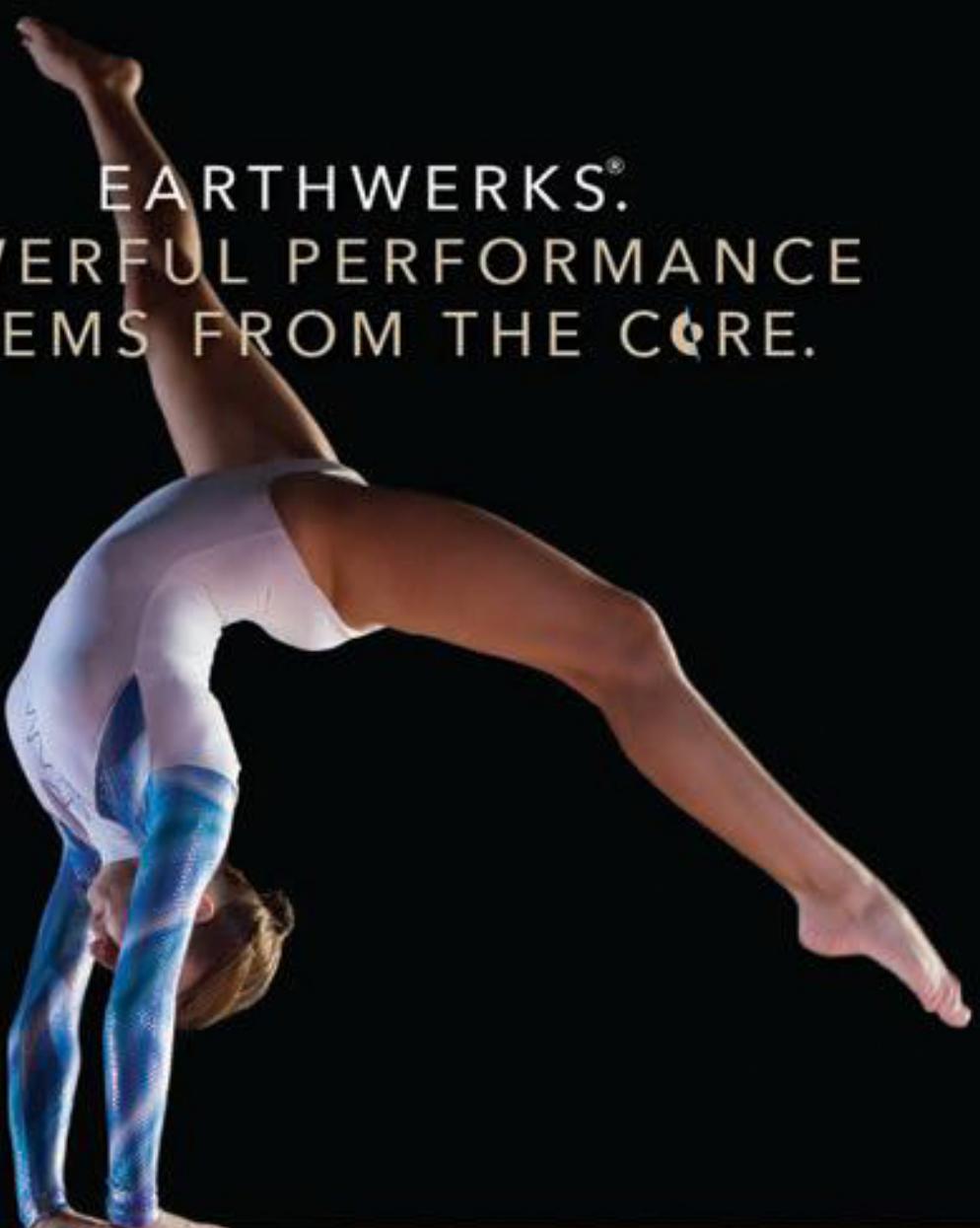
Shaw

Shaw Industries is another major mill that has invested heavily in the rigid core business primarily with Floorte.

Floorte Pro, a new tile rigid core product, launched with 20 SKUs. The waterproof, click product features a lacquer bevel. "There is a trend toward smaller grout lines, which we can do with this product,"

Continued on page 14

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Rigid core

Continued from page 13



Francis said. "The response has been great. This opens it up to mud rooms and bathrooms."

Overall, Floorte Pro offers a diverse portfolio of visuals ranging from hardwood to tile looks. Mineral Mix, for example,

strikes a balance between contemporary concrete and linear metal looks for a chic aesthetic. Each tile has visual grout applied for a quick installation that does not require traditional grout. Blue Ridge Pine is a rich heart pine visual that captures the contrast, character and uniqueness found in natural hardwood.

Tarkett

Tarkett's new ProGen collection is the next generation of rigid core luxury vinyl flooring that provides superior impact and indentation resistance. The product also demonstrates superior durability over tradit-



tional WPC, according to the company.

ProGen's unique compact core design makes installation easy by providing the flexibility to adjust to tight spaces, while maintaining enough rigidity to allow for installation over imperfect subfloors. This new collection has a 20-mil, com-

mercial-grade wear layer and enhanced polyurethane layer that allow ProGen to resist scratches and the rigors of modern life. In addition, its high-density foam backing reduces unwanted noise.

USFloors

Piet Dossche, founder and CEO, said there were 65 Chinese manufacturers exhibiting rigid core products at Domotex Hannover in January, a testament to the incredible momentum of the subcategory. "This is not a fad, this is just the beginning," he said at a recent symposium. "Composite waterproof flooring will be the high double-



digit growth engine in hard surfaces for the next five years."

To that end, USFloors is striving to keep its market-share-leading position among suppliers. The company launched COREtec Pro Plus in Q4 2017 and COREtec Pro Plus Enhanced in January. Both are of SPC construction. USFloors will introduce COREtec Stone in the summer with upwards of 40 SKUs. "Attention to detail and design is what makes Pro Plus and Pro Plus Enhanced stand out from the crowd," said Jamann Stepp, director of marketing and product management. COREtec Pro collections include a double extrusion process with a 1mm cork attached pad. Pro Plus Enhanced also incorporates a four-sided enhanced beveled edge for added realism. As for the forthcoming COREtec Stone, attention to detail will again be key. "The decors, including the tech and spec data that is employed in the Pro Plus collections, along with a proprietary protective coating to prevent scratching and abrasion, will set COREtec Stone apart from the rest," Stepp said. "We see COREtec Stone as tile reinvented."

**Wellmade**

Wellmade continues to expand its Nouveau en vogue HDPC vinyl plank collection. The rigid core features Wellmade's co-extrusion technology and includes standard and wide/long plank options. Wear layers are available in 8-, 12-, and 20-mil options. Wellmade has added new design options for 2018, including character-driven muted gray and brown tones with enhanced texturing on the hardwood side, and contemporary travertine looks in stone. "Dealers have pleased with our competitive pricing, ease of installation and superior overall performance," said Steve Wagner, director of marketing.

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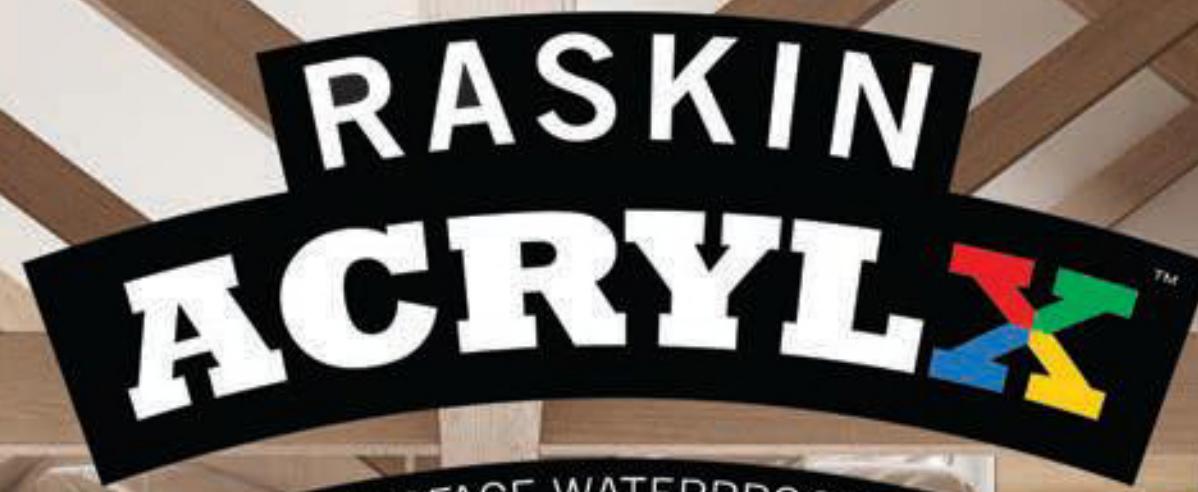


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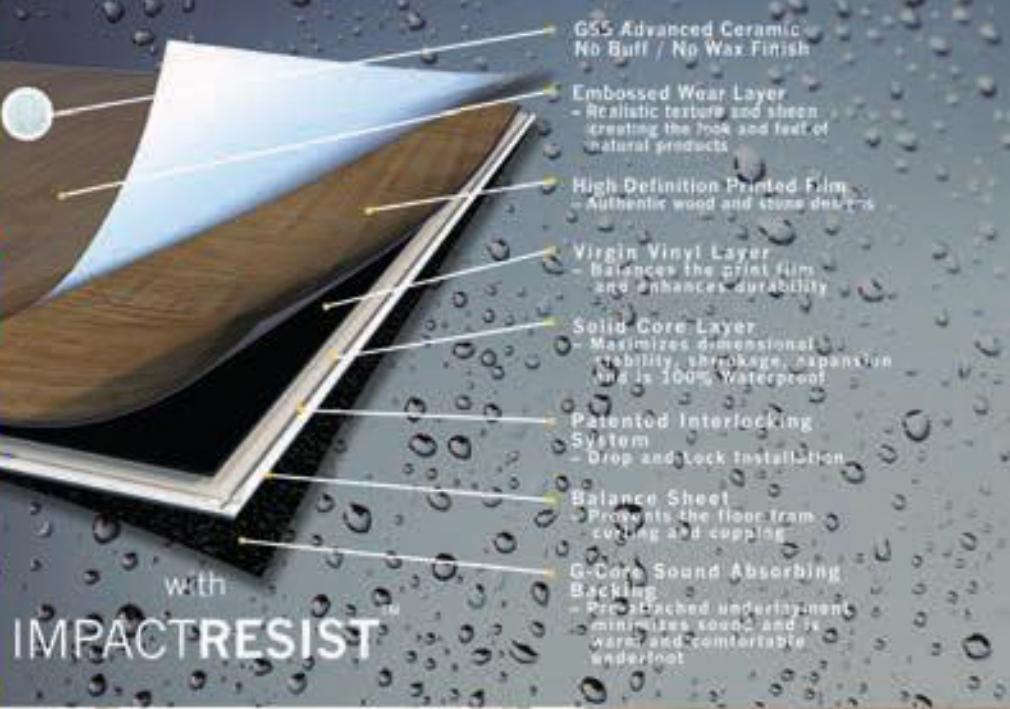
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MARKETING ONLINE

Fearing social media—a thing of the past

By Lindsay Baillie

With all of the resources available today, social media should no longer evoke fear of the

unknown. However, despite the large shift in favor of social media sites, there are still retailers with lingering fears of

how to create, maintain and drive traffic to their social sites.

FCNews spoke with several digital

marketing experts to find solutions to some of the common fears associated with using social media platforms.

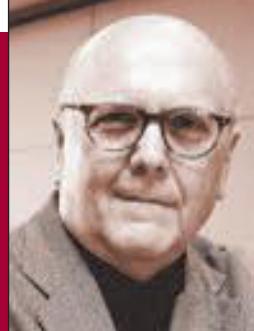
Understanding each social platform. Before using any social media, sites experts suggest conducting a brief Internet search to learn more about each platform. As Katrina Olson, freelance writer and principal of Katrina Olson Strategic Communications, explained, "A quick search will yield tons of free articles and educational downloads about the strengths of each platform, how to use it and how to build a following."

When deciding which platforms to use, it is important to recognize the differences among each site. "Facebook users are great at commenting and sharing," Olson said. "Twitter is good for quick notifications. YouTube is great for demonstrating or explaining a solution or process. LinkedIn can connect you with vendors, suppliers and possibly customers. And blogs can educate while interjecting your company's brand personality."

While it might be overwhelming in choosing which platforms to join, social media experts suggest starting with one or two sites and then adding as necessary. "Most residential retailers should use Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest and Houzz," said Paul Friederichsen, marketing



Lisbeth Calandrino



Paul Friederichsen



Christine Whittemore



Katrina Olson

expert and owner of BrandBiz, a marketing and branding consultancy. "If dealers are also selling a substantial share of Main Street commercial, they should add LinkedIn and Twitter to their list."

Finding someone to run each site. Oftentimes, dealers either run their social sites themselves or have younger people, who are more familiar with social sites, run their social media accounts. However, most experts warn against these practices.

"It's not that the younger people don't understand how to use social media, it's that they probably don't have a marketing background," said Lisbeth Calandrino, FCNews columnist and retail industry consultant. "I suggest dealers hire an industry person with retail experi-

ence—industry people understand the customer as well as the flooring industry. Companies need someone who knows how to follow the customers, connect with them and understand how to build relationships."

If an industry person is not available, experts recommend finding or recruiting a freelancer or social agency to run the social sites with the business owner's involvement. "You (or the employee you designate as responsible) must be involved in reviewing schedules, content and monitoring," Friederichsen said. "You cannot put your social campaign on autopilot and be unaware of the face of your brand on the various platforms."

Allocating time to post and interact. Finding time to participate on social media is a major concern for some floor covering dealers. Yet, the solution is quite simple, according to experts. "Devote at least half an hour every other day in the beginning and also be willing to invest some of your ad budget into boosting your select posts—a little goes a long way," Friederichsen said.

Another way to think of this is by breaking it into small and regular chunks and making it part of the day-to-day processes. "Spend a short amount of time consistently paying attention to what is going on in the network and you can observe and lurk, or you can participate," said Christine Whittemore, chief simplifier, Simple Marketing Now. "By having these time limits it means you're not going to get overwhelmed and spend too much time."

What kind of content to post. When thinking of what content to post, it is important to give people what they want to see relevant to a store's product offerings. "If I am considering wood floors, I want to know how to clean and maintain them, and which finish will best meet my needs," Olson explained. "If I'm considering installing wood floors, I'm interested in strength and durability, and the differences between species. If you give me information I want, I'll keep coming back; but if you just try to push products and services, I'll get annoyed."

Another key point to remember is that it is important to empathize with the audience. "Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another—it is the basis for all relationships," Calandrino explained. "When people talk about their pet, they want more than a 'like.' A like doesn't build relationships—one needs to post comments. We should treat online conversations as if they were face-to-face discussions."

There are also a plethora of sites available to help dealers who are having trouble creating new content. BuzzSumo is an idea generator for new topics and articles to share. MeetEdgar is a subscription-based site that gives fun content for social media. Hootsuite and Sprout Social are other sites that will link social accounts together to help monitor and post.

In addition to using these services, dealers should also be aware of what their competitors are doing on their social accounts. Find out what they are posting, what times they are

posting and how many reactions—likes, comments, shares, etc.—they are getting on those posts.

How to monitor a site's effectiveness. Before retailers can accurately determine the effectiveness of posting on a social site, they must clearly define their goals. "If you've set goals, you can attach metrics and measure the results," Olson explained.

"After testing a few different types of content or tactics over time, you may find some platforms perform better than others. Be sure to do your research and realize that a number of factors can impact success."

When monitoring social media sites, it is important to look at analytics and not focus on just getting "likes." In fact, some social media experts equate these sites to office picnics, parades on Main Street, and other social gatherings where communication of thoughts and ideas are necessary. "These are places where people socialize," Whittemore explained. "You meet people on these sites and that's great, but it doesn't mean they'll be customers. If you have goals, you can monitor the sites and stay focused in your activity. Then step back and evaluate whether being on those sites is time well spent."

How to promote the business more effectively. Promoting a business on social media can be tricky, experts say, because a dealer does not want to come across as being too self-promotional. The key is to use creative content to remain top of mind for consumers regardless of where they are in their purchasing journey.

"The goal is to build relationships that will eventually lead to sales," Olson said. "You want to engage with followers and fans by giving them information they want, not by simply trying to sell them. We all have the friend who talks about herself all the time. We also have the friend who listens, cares and wants to help us. Who would you want to spend more time with?"

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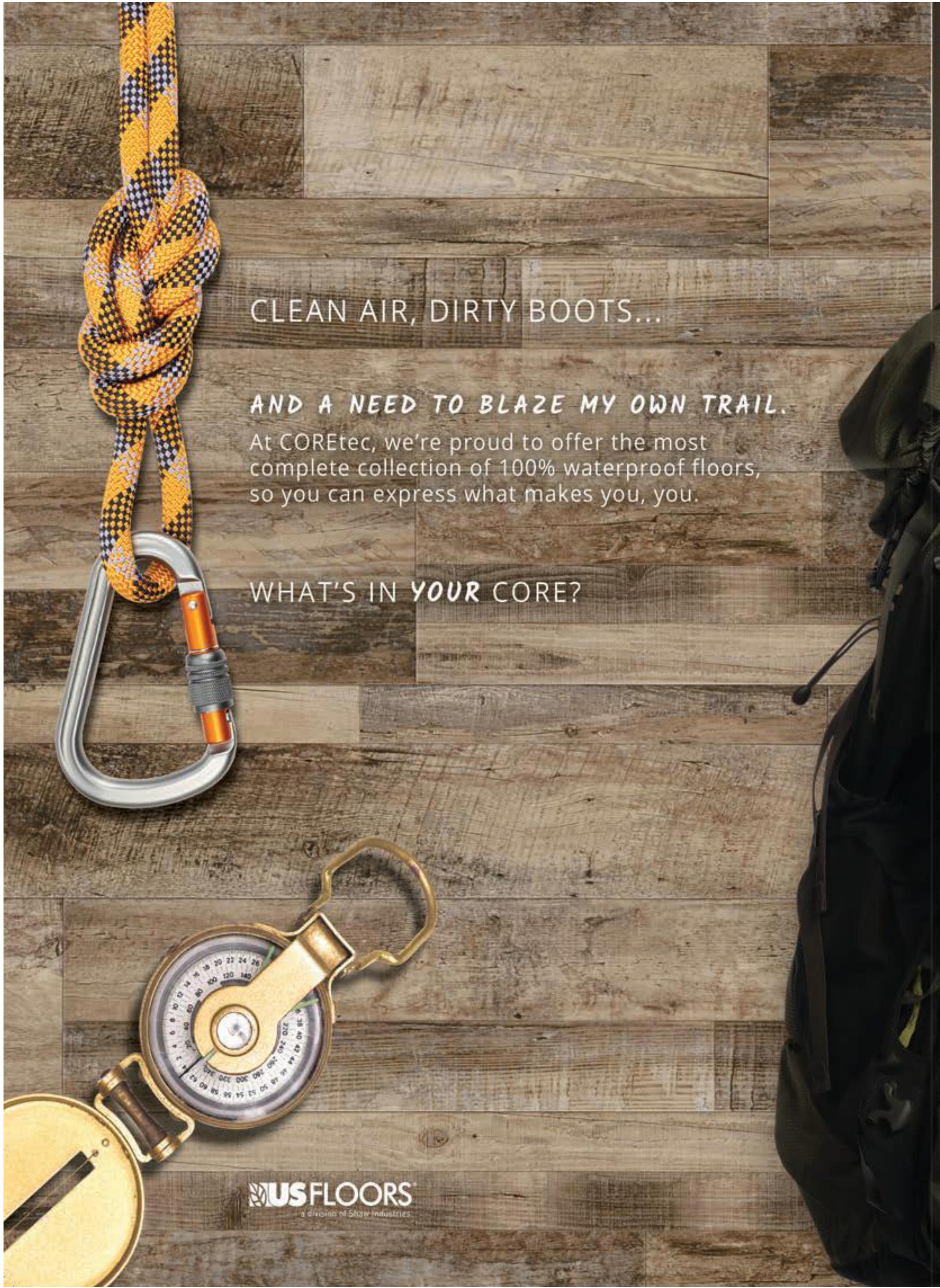
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American OEM achieves CARB-exempt status

BURNS, TENN.—American OEM, a private-label hardwood flooring manufacturer, has obtained renewed status of its CARB ULEF exemption on engineered wood flooring products. This renewal was granted after a perfect record of passing indoor air quality tests for formaldehyde emissions and was also extended to include product with HDF core materials, which the company will manufacture beginning in the second quarter of 2018.

Essentially, this exemption grants American OEM the ability

to reduce submittal samples for VOC testing and establishes the company's products as ultra-low risk for off gassing.

HPVA Laboratories, a third-party association, performed the tests. Highly respected and independent, HPVA has been testing and certifying North American manufacturers of engineered wood products for more than 50 years.

"The health and safety of our consumers is of upmost concern to us," said Don Finkell, American OEM founder and CEO. "We will continue quar-

terly tests for VOCs to ensure that we remain compliant with all regulations, even though it is no longer required."

In addition to CARB-exempt status, American OEM has also achieved Indoor Advantage Gold certification for ultra-low emitting materials, verifying that all hardwood produced in the company's Tennessee facility contributes to healthy indoor air quality for customers of American OEM private-label products, as well as

Products sold under American OEM's Hearthwood brand are covered by the new CARB exemption.

all flooring sold under the company's new Hearthwood brand.

This type of continuous quality assurance provides customers with peace of mind, something many lost after the "60 Minutes" TV special exposed unsafe levels of formaldehyde in wood-based products sold in a



major retail chain, according to Finkell.

Armstrong extends Diamond 10 tech to new collection

LANCASTER, PA.—Armstrong Flooring is extending its exclusive Diamond 10 Technology, which was first made available on its resilient sheet flooring line, to Appalachian Ridge, a new solid hardwood collection. Utilizing the technology, Armstrong Flooring believes it is able to deliver a beautiful solid hardwood that is more versatile and durable.

"Our research consistently shows solid hardwood is the most coveted flooring choice by consumers for its timeless beauty and the considerable value it adds to a home," said Michael Bell, vice president-wood. "But a factor preventing some from purchasing is concern over scratches and maintaining that beauty over time. When investing in hardwood, consumers seek peace of mind that their floor will look beautiful for the long term. For many consumers, scratch is a top factor when considering the durability of the floor."

Appalachian Ridge features scraped and brushed artisan effects combined with gentle sanding to create a refined, tactile canvas. When treated with carefully selected stains and color washes, this fusion of soft focus texture and multi-tonal colors creates a designer floor with subtlety and sophistication. "Converting shoppers into happy purchasers is every retailer's goal, and gorgeous hardwood flooring that offers scratch resistance is a powerful tool that can help dealers close the sale," Bell said.

Armstrong's Appalachian Ridge is the second hardwood collection to incorporate Diamond 10 Technology. Paragon, which was introduced in late 2017, was the first of the company's hardwood offerings to incorporate the advanced finish.

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dear david

Achieving a better work-life balance

Dear David:
I purchased two flooring stores from my parents about 10 years ago. My wife works alongside me and we have two children. Growing up, I watched my parents spend most of their time inside the store, which took a toll on my childhood and their well-being. I swore I would not let that happen to my family, but I find myself doing the same thing. Help me break this pattern before this business breaks me.

Dear Owner,
You are not alone. A recent study by Family Living Today and Now Sourcing uncovered surprising statistics about work-life balance across the country. Right now, the United States ranks 30th out of 38 countries that have positive work-life balance. Maybe that's because, according to the research, more than 11% of American workers say they work 50 or more hours a week, and

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66% do not believe they have a healthy work-life balance. In fact, many people (33%) also find themselves working weekends or holidays.

According to the same study, some of the short-term effects at home of a poor work/life balance include: 38% lack of focus and engagement at home; 51% missed important life events; 40% ruined time spent with family/friends (conference calls, called away from activities); and 50% less time with friends and family.

Some short-term effects at work include: 36% poor productivity; 68% poor morale; and 41% feeling burnt-out or fatigued.

What's even more alarming are the long-term health effects for employees working over 55 hours per week: higher risk of coronary heart disease and stroke; higher risk of anxiety (1.74x) and depression (1.66x); higher stress and cortisol levels throughout the day when expected to be available to work on their off-hours.

David Romano is the founder of Romano Consulting Group as well as Benchmarkinc Recruiting. He is currently the director of Romano Group, headquartered in Dallas. You can contact David at david@romanogroup.com.



DAVID
ROMANO

Here are some things that can be done:

Switch off your phone. Checking updates and emails during your time off interrupts your relaxation and stresses out your body.

Make time for exercise. Physical activity boosts energy and concentration and is usually the first thing scratched from your schedule when you are busy.

Eliminate the extras. People who are overworked tend to overwork themselves. I recommend painting a Kanban chart on your office wall organizing tasks, with "to do," "doing" and "done." This will allow you to keep track of tasks, become more efficient and feel comfortable walking away from the office when everything you set out to do for the day is done.

Delegate. This is normally the Achilles heel of small business owners. There is glory in being involved in every facet of your business and putting in more hours than everyone else. However, studies have shown no correlation between working longer and harder and the profitability of a business. The most successful entrepreneurs own a business and not a job and spend their time managing people and process. Once you build a strong, self-reliant team with detailed job descriptions and dashboards your life will change in an instant.

The E-Myth Foundation found that business owners who took more than one month vacation each year were both more efficient and more profitable than those who took less time. Spend individualized time with each member of your immediate family every year. This allows for bonding and an appreciation for those who have sacrificed for the good of your career.

Wood

Continued from page 1

In terms of volume, that growth estimate equates to roughly 930 million square feet, lifting the hardwood flooring category ever closer to the 1 billion-square-foot threshold.

Ask a roomful of hardwood flooring manufacturer executives to identify the root cause of this growth, and many will point to the strength of key end-use sectors here in the U.S. market.

"Single-family construction and residential replacement continue to be the core drivers of demand for hardwood," said Dan Natkin, vice president, wood and laminates, Mannington.

Natalie Cady, hardwood category manager, Shaw Floors, agrees, citing consumption trends and demographic shifts. "Residential is driving the market, and for Shaw that means both single family and residential re-do. And as our single-family business grows, it has that wonderful trickle-down effect."

By that, Cady means more people are able to get into a new home while sellers have been able to get better market value on their existing properties. As for the former, she is finding that many people strongly aspire to real hardwood and wood lookalikes. She also sees a direct correlation to influential purchasing segments. "Millennials want wood, and they are the No. 1 con-

sumer right now. At the same time, the empty nesters are downsizing and finding they can afford hardwood flooring."

But that doesn't imply that it's going to be smooth sailing. "For us, the driving factor is still the housing market," said Wade Bondrowski, director of sales, U.S., Mercier Wood Flooring.



Most of Mohawk's launches in the wood category entail engineered products on an HDF platform.

"Although this segment is trending up, we are still below normal levels."

Other executives are seeing hardwood growth across virtually all end-use sectors, including commercial specified and Main Street applications. "We think it is all of the above," said Michael Bell, vice president, hardwood, Armstrong Flooring. "A more stable economic environment continues to steer the hardwood segment on a course of steady growth, with increases in demand in both the new construction and remodeling markets. We also see hardwood opportunities in the commercial marketplace."

But that doesn't mean all segments within the hardwood

flooring category are growing at the same pace. When it comes to solid vs. engineered, for example—or even between subcategories within the engineered flooring offering—activity can be quite mixed. "While the wood category grew by low single digits in 2017, the growth rates were different between solid and engineered, with solids declining in overall volume and engineered growing by mid-single digits," Mannington's Natkin said.

It's not that the solid segment of the hardwood flooring business is no longer an in-demand category. Truth be told, it still is preferred by many customers, home builders and designers in markets like the Northeast

and Pacific Northwest. Rather, experts say, the rapid development and evolution of products that fall under the category of engineered floors is opening up opportunities even in hardcore solid markets.

"There's never been more changes taking place in the wood flooring segment than what we're seeing before our eyes right now," Tom Lape, president, Mohawk Residential, told FCNews. "The biggest trend we're seeing in the wood flooring segment today is a blurring of the lines within the product categories. For example, we're clearly seeing many customers, dealers and consumers moving away from solid at a rate that has been running unabated for five years running and continues to accelerate. We see the engineered category evolving right in front of our eyes from what was historically a 5-ply construction format to an HDF product solution."

Mohawk is so convinced that engineered wood flooring products based on an HDF core are quickly overtaking conventional, multi-ply hardwood flooring options that it is banking on wholesale consumer and end-user acceptance of the emerging format.

"When you see high-end custom builders and high-end production builders in the Northeast and Pacific Northwest coming off solid, it is eye-opening," Lape said. "That's not to say that people living out in the Hamptons are buying engineered. Solids are not going away, but where there is a reasonable trade off in terms of cost, value, etc., I think you're seeing the market accelerate the move to engineered."

Continued on page 24

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Wood

Continued from page 22

And all this plays to Mohawk's strengths, according to Lape. "We try to focus on our game, which is leveraging our position as a true, integrated and vertical HDF engineered wood producer. Making all our own HDF internally gives us an advantage in terms of consistency and uniformity of the product. Second, we produce all those products here in North America, which gives us an advantage in terms of supply chain and reliability."

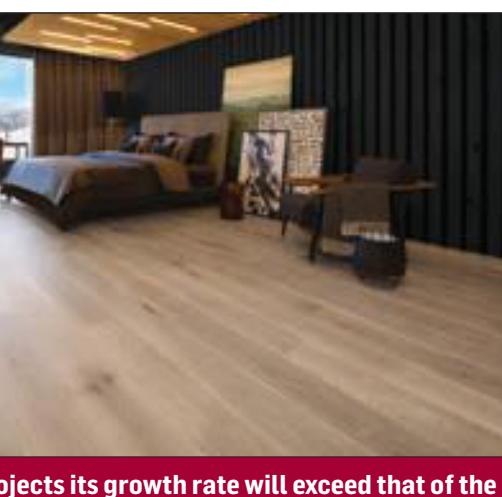
For others, the continued migration from solid to engineered doesn't necessarily spell the end of a category. While engineered floors offer opportunity for design innovation combined with installation flexibility, solids still have their place.

As Armstrong's Bell explained: "The dynamics are different in solid vs. engineered. In engineered, we see much of the growth occurring on the bookends of the market with significant increases in the opening price point/value engineered products and the best/premium sliced- and sawn-face engineered products. Solid is similarly seeing increased activity on the best/pre-

mium side of the market."

Innovation, Bell added, continues to happen across both structures. "While there is significant activity in engineered floors, we also see that solid wood flooring remains the go-to product in certain parts of the country and for key consumer segments."

While it is generally accepted that consumer tastes differ by region and/or climate, some point to inherent limitations of solid products as an impediment to acceptance beyond the core solid markets. "With the demand and overall trend moving toward longer and wider, there are limitations you have with solids that are not there with engineered," Shaw Floors' Cady said, citing the tendency of solid floors to expand and contract more easily than engineered. "Having the ability to go longer/wider will help people move more toward engineered. Plus, with single-family home construction on the rise, that represents an increase in concrete slab construction—and that lends itself to engineered. At the



Mirage projects its growth rate will exceed that of the hardwood industry at large. Shown is white oak.

end of the day, we believe the solid market—which includes both finished and unfinished product—is steady, not actually shrinking."

With consumers continuing to ride the longer/wider wave, suppliers remain committed to giving them more of what they're looking for. "The good story is the industry is not sitting still; we're giving consumers more of what they want—wider and longer," Mohawk's Lape explained. "We're selling planks up to 80 inches long and 9 inches wide, and we're making better-performing products for contractors, retailers as well as consumers."

While all this continues to play out, suppliers continue to

fortify—and diversify—their product mix to ensure they have all the bases covered.

Over the past 18 months, for example, Q u e b e c - b a s e d Wickham Hardwood introduced several new engineered offerings designed to complement its solid hardwood collections.

According to Paul Rezuke, vice

president residential

sales, U.S., the breakdown seems to follow along geographic lines. "As part of our engineered strategy, we targeted two platforms based on a $\frac{1}{2}$ - and a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch format. We initially envisioned that the $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch product would be most suited for the U.S. market and the $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch line for our Canadian business partners. What we are seeing is the demand in the U.S. market for a thicker platform appears to be on the rise. With this demand, we are projecting a significant demand for $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch platform engineered products in our U.S. footprint."

Tracking design trends

The shift in product preference

within the hardwood flooring segment is not limited to the product's core construction. Industry observers are also keeping a close eye on changing consumer tastes relative to color, species, surface texture and even board length and width. For many suppliers, staying ahead of consumer trends and anticipating what's going to be the next big thing is akin to shooting after a moving target.

"The key is making sure we stay out in front in terms of styling and design," Shaw Floors' Cady said. "We're still seeing the move toward longer, wider planks, but we are also seeing a move toward more traditional visuals. Instead of going into the European wide-oak visuals, we're going back to basics by focusing on the natural characteristics of hardwood—meaning showcasing less texture and lighter colors so consumers can see the actual wood, not covering it up with dark stains."

At the other end of the spectrum, some suppliers are seeing a mild resurgence in demand not for domestic species—which had been rising in popularity—but for exotic looks. With anecdotal information and consumer purchasing trends showing shoppers gravitating more toward home-

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grown species such as walnut, hickory and birch, to name a few, others—including companies like Ribadao Wood Boutique—say there's still a viable market for imported product.

"We're still very bullish on exotics, although it's just one line that we offer," Bruce Hammer, vice president of sales, said. "It's true the U.S. market is nowhere near what it was for exotics about 10 years ago, but that doesn't mean there's no opportunity for us. We consider our products to be more 'boutique' offerings. It's still a viable product line for us to be offering."

Ongoing challenges

Hardwood flooring has long been linked to its ability to contribute to rising home values, and it remains—as suppliers argue—the product that many homeowners covet. But aggressive competition from competing "wood-look" visuals available with LVT, WPC, laminate and, now, ceramic is a cause for concern.

"The growth of wood-look products such as WPC is an issue," Mannington's Natkin said. "While cannibalization is minimal for the consumer who really desires hardwood, there is conversion for consumers who are not sure what product is right for them."

Armstrong's Bell is in agreement, adding that—with the exception of tile—most of these products cost less than real hardwood. Also at play, he said, is the fact that the quality of the visuals and textures has evolved so much that many consumers feel comfortable using these faux wood products instead of the real thing. "However, there is nothing that can truly compete with genuine hardwood from either a look or value equation. It is a great long-term investment and can actually become a strong resale argument, exceeding the initial installation cost of the floors. And, it's organic, natural and renewable, and, of course, since it is natural, has less pattern repeat."

Traditional, hardwood-only suppliers seem to be taking it in stride. As Wickham's Rezuke explained, "Currently, WPC appears to be the category of the month. We've experienced this in the past with both laminate and LVT. Our position remains that there will be new products that will present challenges. But in the long run, hardwood will always maintain a significant market share in the flooring industry."

Those companies that supply the full range of competing hard surface materials believe all products can successfully coexist. But that doesn't mean equal market

share for all product segments.

"It's an ongoing conversation with all flooring suppliers and it comes down to having products to fulfill consumer needs and wants, Shaw Floors' Cady said.

But wood's classification as a natural product also subjects the category to price fluctuations due to rising raw material costs. "We are seeing some upward pressure in raw material pricing," Mannington's Natkin said. "Certain regions are more dramatic than others."

Armstrong, one of the suppliers to pass on increases to its customers earlier this month, also attributes the hikes to rising natural gas and electricity prices—all

of which impact costs to power the plants. Bell doesn't see any let-up in sight. "We expect this cost pressure to continue throughout 2018."

Despite these challenges, suppliers are optimistic about the category's prospects in 2018. "We predict the overall hardwood category will have a moderate growth rate of 3%-5% this year," said Brad Williams, vice president of sales and marketing for Boa-Franc, maker of the Mirage brand. "We feel our greatest opportunity continues to be within our existing network. We will continue to understand our customers' needs and focus on

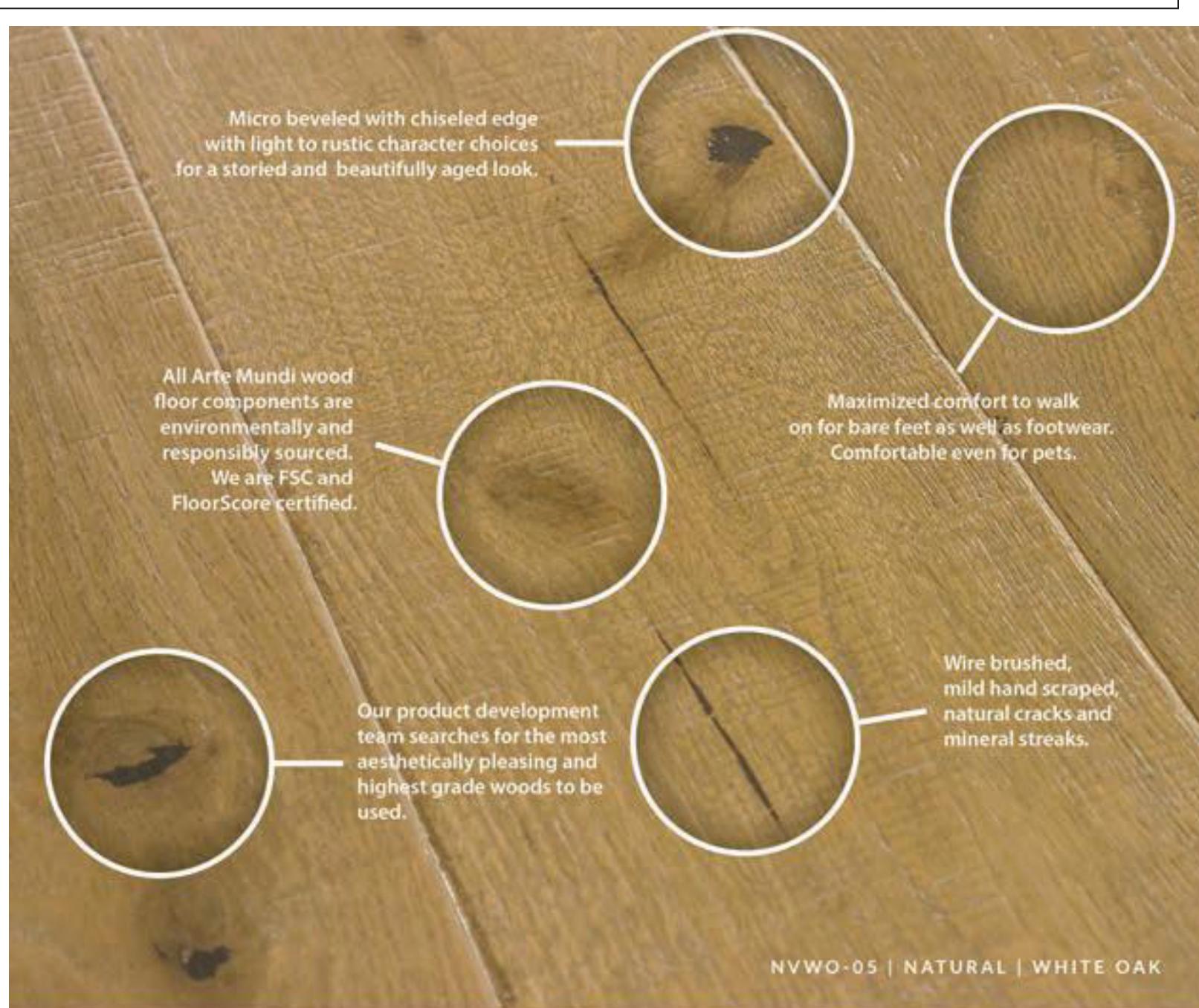
Mercier expects offerings in its Generations collection will drive growth this year. Pictured is white oak Madera.

creating opportunities for them."

Don Finkell, president and CEO, American OEM, is confident the category will grow by at least 6% this year, surpassing the rate of growth achieved in 2017. The prospects look even better from an internal standpoint, he noted. "I expect our company to more than double that growth rate at about 12% to 15%. "We are adding new



products for our existing distributors, building on our private-label programs and developing coverage of our new Hearthwood brand. Plus, we will be adding more domestically made products to our Hemisphere brand."



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Nuflors' SetaGrip grabs the attention of retailers

RESILIENT INSTALLATION SYSTEM UTILIZES SUCTION TECHNOLOGY

By Lindsay Baillie

It is said that imitation is the highest form of flattery. This certainly holds true for Nuflors' new SetaGrip product, which imitates the nano-suction technology on geckos' feet to create an adhesive-, tape- and click-free luxury vinyl floor.

"It's no secret nature has inspired solutions for everyday challenges, including those in design," said David Kim, managing partner, Nuflors. "Scientists have studied geckos' feet and found they contain physical properties that promote stickiness. Using biomimicry, we studied geckos and began looking into nano-suction technology. We applied this technique to our flooring manufacturing process and SetaGrip was born."

This patent-pending flooring installation technology uses millions of nano-sized pores and vacuum, negative fluid pressure to securely adhere flooring to non-porous surfaces. Once the flooring is pressed against a surface, the nano-sized pores—which act like millions of micro-suction cups—are activated and generate a strong adhesion to the surface.

SetaGrip was developed to simplify installation methods in the flooring industry. Unlike other installation options that can be labor intensive, require machinery and need to be reinforced, SetaGrip maintains a strong adhesion similar to glue-down methods without the need for glue, the company claims.

"Quick-install products such as loose lay and click cannot match the value of this technology," Kim explained. "Our patented core layer is specially formulated with white ceramic particles to provide extra dimensional stability. SetaGrip's nano-suction technology also allows the floors to be easily replaced and reused."

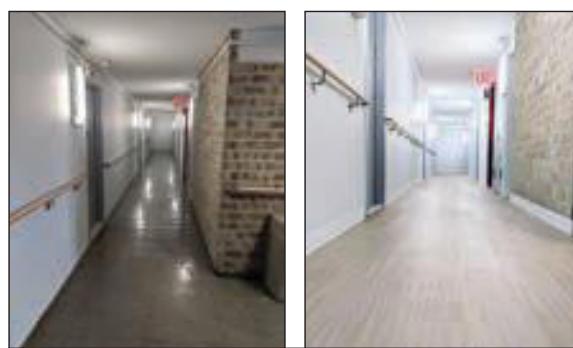
In addition to a simpler installation, SetaGrip is waterproof, aids in sound insulation, does not promote the growth of mildew or mold and is able to be removed without residue.

As a newer product on the market, SetaGrip provides flooring dealers with a unique product story, according to Kim. "It is the answer to any designer, builder or

installer's dilemma with flooring. There is no need for adhesives; therefore, you don't have to close down an area where you are installing. You can immediately walk on the floor as soon as it's installed, and it can be installed over almost any existing floor."

Goes down easy

While other types of flooring can be difficult to repair, SetaGrip



SetaGrip can be installed directly over non-porous surfaces. Shown are the before and after pictures of a hallway project where SetaGrip was installed directly over VCT.

can simply be picked up and replaced, according to the company. Nuflors sees this product as a huge win for retailers and installers. "Solving problems equals satisfied customers, which in turn equates to success for the retailers, distributors and installers," Kim stated. "The product sells itself; the time, ease and speed in which [installers can lay down] SetaGrip will have customers clamoring for more."

Even though the product only entered the market in January, it is already drawing the attention of retailers, installers and consumers. "I think it is one of the bigger innovations that I've seen in the flooring industry right now," said Scott Lubinsky, business development and sales, TF Andrews in Westchester, N.Y. "I think it's slightly ahead of the curve and it is completely a millennial-based product—the angle of the green story and it being a replication of what's happening in nature."

For installers like James Hong, an associate with Cornerstone Mechanical, Oakland Gardens, N.Y., SetaGrip is a convenient product that is easy to install and very forgiving. "It's easy to maneuver between each plank."

Hong has also received positive feedback from consumers. "All our clients love the product and how it installed."

Barry Goldberg, president of Everything Floors, West Islip, N.Y., also noted the ease of installation. "It's so much easier to work with than anything else I've installed," he explained. "No prep work is needed, and it goes down easy. If you have to lift it up to adjust it, it comes right up."

lessons learned

A few minutes makes a big difference

When asked to compare the difference in performance characteristics between a top producing sales professional and an average performer, I always respond that a common trait professionals exhibit is they are willing to invest an extra few minutes per day toward their goal of being successful. By this I mean the minutes they are willing to prepare prior to their sales shift beginning.

Ask yourself if the following scenario sounds vaguely familiar: one minute before he has to be at work, the low-performing salesperson comes gliding through the front door with his breakfast in one hand and his cell phone in the other. He appears as if he has been out of bed for about 10 minutes. His hair is still damp, his tie is draped over his shoulder and his shirt tail is untucked. His ration-



TOM JENNINGS

Can you imagine a pro golfer stepping to the first tee with no warm-up session on the driving range? How about the bus unloading a football team in uniform at kickoff time? No mental warm-ups. No physical warm-ups. Just toss the coin and kick off. Never going to happen.

You can't imagine a great singer not going through the scales before a concert. A talented musician would not perform without ensuring their instrument was in tune. Why should striving to be any less professional in our chosen field be considered acceptable behavior?

Sales personnel and managers alike should spend a few minutes

each morning walking your showroom to make sure that everything is in order. Are there new items displayed? If so, do you fully understand them? Are all prices clearly marked? Are all of the lights on and in working order? Is the background music playing at a pleasant volume?

Are the design tables clean and ready for the first customer in the door? Are your demonstration supplies restocked and freshened? While these may seem like small details, professionals realize they are not. Any unnecessary time spent fumbling and stumbling in a customer's presence reduces her perception of your professionalism and causes concern. As the customer's perception of your abilities declines, so does your chance of making this sale. Why take this chance?

Recently, a dealer asked me for suggestions regarding a salesman who was habitually late nearly every morning. When I inquired how long he had been employed, I was told 18 years. I laughed and said not to worry about changing this guy's behavior as his ship had sailed a long time ago. If he wasn't fired with enthusiasm by now, then perhaps the time had come for him to be fired with enthusiasm.

Remember, as a manager, you will always get the behavior you are willing to accept.

Tom Jennings is vice president of professional development for the World Floor Covering Association (WFCA). Jennings, a retail sales training guru, has served in various capacities within the WFCA.

Proper education is the key to closing sales

By Lindsay Baillie

Arming retail salespeople with the knowledge to prescribe and sell the right underlayment for the job is the key to success, suppliers say. Once a retail sales associate is properly trained on the latest products, he or she must make it a point to educate the consumer.

Following are a few key points to remember when selling underlayment.

Look for trade-up opportunities. Underlayment offered on a good/better/best platform provide retailers with twice the opportunity to upsell—once, when the consumer decides whether to purchase underlayment along with her floor, and again when she has the option to choose between underlayment of different qualities.

As Jeff Bonkiewicz, channel manager, Laticrete, explained, “Underlayment products are valuable accessories that help increase margins and generate higher ticket sales for retailers. Upselling from an entry-level product to a specialty underlayment is achievable through comprehensive product education. This focus on education starts with the dealer outlining the benefits of using an underlayment before installing materials.”

Focus on the benefits, not features. Once a consumer learns about the characteristics of underlayment, the product will no longer seem like an accessory but rather a necessity. As most underlayment suppliers point out, qualities such as sound absorption and comfort sound great to a consumer who is looking to install new flooring.

“Sound absorption is extremely important in multi-story, single-family homes, condos, apartments and multi-story office and hotel buildings,” explained Jim Wink, vice president of sales and marketing, Foam Products. “In terms of comfort for hard surface flooring, a high-quality foam underlayment can soften the feel of walking on the floor, especially with thinner laminates and vinyl plank flooring.”

Underlays complete the installation. When a consumer enters a store looking for flooring, she is typically only interested in the style and color of her new floors. Suppliers believe it is crucial for the retailer to slow her down and force her to think through the function of her entire application, including hidden problems that can occur within the life of the floor-

ing materials.

“For example, when it comes to floating floors, most consumers and contractors know they need an underlayment,” said Deanna Summers, marketing coordinator, MP Global. “Problem solved, right? The trick is to understand the full installation and match the right performing underlayment that will be best suited for the entire makeup of the floor, not just the floor covering materials.”

In addition to its other char-



Explaining the benefits of underlayment to the consumer can lead to great customer satisfaction after a job is completed.

acteristics, underlays also reduce the amount of floor preparation required for a suc-

cessful installation. As Wade Verble, vice president of underlayment, DriTac, noted, “The associated labor savings will typically offset the cost of the underlayment and labor needed to install the pad.”

Padding extends the life of the floor. Since underlayment can protect installations in various ways—such as limiting water intrusion, damages and cracking as well as aiding in sound reduction—this accessory

helps to present a better overall surface to adhere finished flooring. “Adding an appropriate underlayment could mean the difference between a three- to five-year installation and a durable lifetime installation,” Laticrete’s Bonkiewicz said.

Providing consumers with the proper underlayment can also create consumer trust. As DriTac’s Verble explains, “Peak performance for any flooring system is always optimal and underlayment is critical to achieving the highest level of results and customer satisfaction.”

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Latest bamboo, cork intros stir visual interest

By Lindsay Baillie

Bamboo Hardwoods

Bamboo Hardwoods' new Symphony line features a hybrid of rigid core with a natural strand woven bamboo wear layer. The line combines the natural beauty of authentic bamboo floors with a waterproof rigid core allowing for installations in even the most undesirable locations.

Symphony is available in 72 x 5 1/8 x 9/32 planks and features a four-sided Uniclic locking system. Its 1.2mm strand woven bamboo veneer is wire brushed and stained. Symphony will be available in June in two colors: anise and currant.



Cali Bamboo

Cali Bamboo has launched GeoWood, an engineered hardwood floor combining real timber layered over GeoCore—Cali's stabilizing limestone composite foundation.

The design layer atop each GeoWood plank is up to 1.2mm thick and features sustainably farmed bamboo and lumber from Lacey Act-compliant managed forests.

Made with AquaDefy technology, GeoWood boasts proven moisture protection, making it ideal for bathrooms, kitchens and below-grade spaces such as basements. Shielded by a 10-coat scratch resistant finish, GeoWood is ideal for spaces with heavy traffic, large dogs and the wear and tear of everyday life.



Torlys

CorkWood brings together the look of wood, the durability of laminate and the comfort of cork. It comes in two collections: CorkWood Designer, which features 6-foot planks in nine colors, and CorkWood Elite, available in planks spanning nearly 4-feet long and five colors. CorkWood is engineered with a HDF smart core for dent resistance and a 3mm (Designer) or 2.5mm (Elite) thick top layer of compressed cork. It also includes the Torlys CorkPlus attached underlayment for added warmth and sound insulation.



USFloors

USFloors' current Cork Canvas collection is a digitally enhanced cork floor that features travertine decors. Digitally enhanced cork floors provide the beauty, depth and texture consumers expect in a natural stone or hardwood floor while maintaining the advantages of cork.

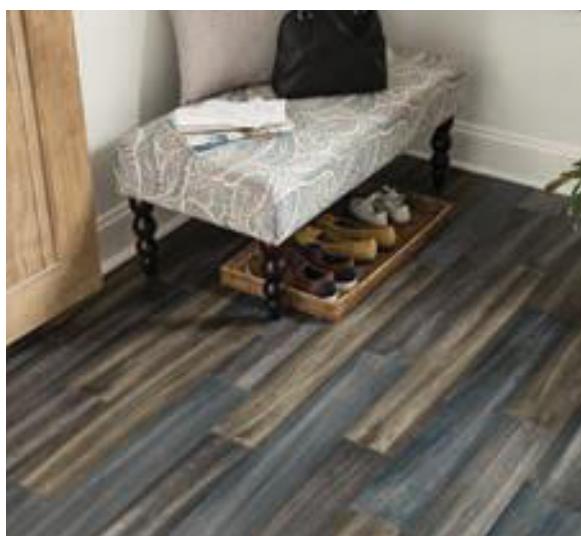
This flooring uses digital print technology to capture the colors, nuances, grains and textures of real stone and hardwood. These visuals are printed directly on a cork top layer, which is applied to an HDF core. A durable, embossed hot coat finish is applied to the cork top layer, while additional cork is added as an attached underlayment.



WE Cork

WE Cork's Corkoleum is a 3mm rolled cork flooring with a rubber and cork base and a cork veneer. Ideal for glue-down applications, Corkoleum is a very low, thin product. Made up of mainly cork, the flooring is marketed as being quiet, comfortable, warm and water resistant. Corkoleum is ideal for wet areas in both residential and commercial settings.

Also from WE Cork is a line of wall panels available for both residential and commercial applications. Available in two different visuals—brick, which comes in three different colors, and bark—WE Cork's line of wall panels can be used for decorative purposes as well as a sound insulator.



Wellmade

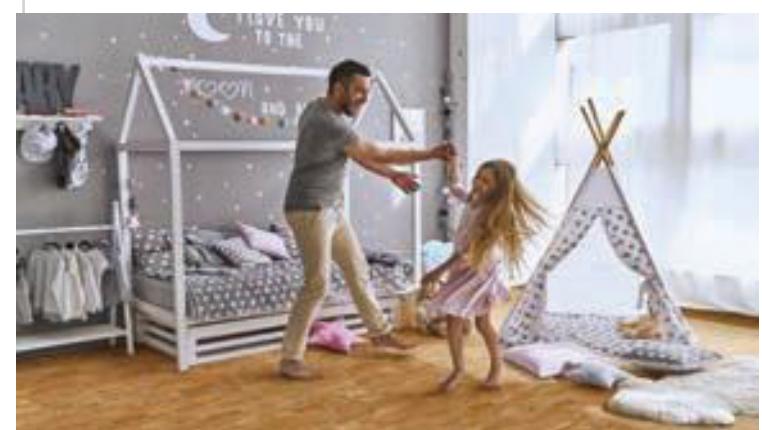
Wellmade unveils a variety of new bamboo looks as part of its Opti-Wood flooring collection. Opti-Wood couples the performance virtues of rigid core flooring technology with real bamboo or hardwood wear layer veneers. The product features Wellmade's Hydri-HDPC technology, a moisture protection system that seals out topical moisture and boasts a 100% waterproof HDPC core.

Wellmade's new bamboo flooring is just over 5 inches wide, 48-plus inches long and 8.5mm thick, and features the Uniclic locking system. Colors range from traditional carbonized to multi-color and character-driven glazing options.

Wicanders

Wicanders Cork GO is a budget-friendly floating floor made with the company's cork double layer. The collection comes in 10 cork visuals and contains all the signature Corktech benefits found in Wicanders' products. Cork GO acts as a noise buffer between the floor and the rooms underneath and reduces walking sound up to 53%. The floor also acts as natural thermal insulation.

Cork GO provides a unique comfort in movement, even when walking barefoot. It also has a longer life span due to its elasticity, compressibility and ability to absorb high shocks.



U.S.-China tariffs

Continued from page 1

\$3 billion in imports of U.S. food and other goods, 128 categories in all.

The penalties will not happen right away, if at all. The designation of targeted products will be followed by a comment period in which American companies can provide feedback to the Trump administration on the product choices. The administration will hold a public hearing on the submissions on May 15 in Washington, and companies will have until May 22 to file final objections.

The move stems from a White House investigation into China's use of pressure, intimidation and theft to obtain American technologies.

Flooring executives argue that in a global economy, any trade war between economic powers would ultimately result in a slowdown of the world economy. Thomas Baert, president of CFL Flooring, a China-based LVT supplier, said issuing large import tariffs sounds like a great idea since theoretically it would help local production in the West but would hurt categories like LVT, which are mostly sourced in China. "In our industry, the product categories that are imported at this stage cannot be made on the domestic machines," Baert said. "Although several manufacturers are now transforming some production lines to be able to, it is questionable whether this will truly replace China production."

Don Finkell, CEO of American OEM, a domestic wood manufacturer, had a different take as he pointed to the U.S. trade deficit. "We're running at an \$800 billion trade deficit with the rest of the world, of which \$500 billion of that is with China. Most economists say that it is unsustainable, but they don't really agree on what the consequences are. It's been this way for more than a decade and growing. Since more jobs are involved in making a product than in importing a product, loss of jobs seems to be the long-term consequence of a trade deficit."

Finkell said wood flooring going to China from the U.S. has a combination of tariffs, fees and taxes in the range of 27%. If there is a tariff on wood flooring under these trade actions, he said he would expect it to be in the range of 25%. He termed it "significant but not catastrophic to the industry."

Flooring observers say the tariffs—should they be imple-

mented—would impact the full line distributor to a greater extent than other sectors since wholesalers have been importing LVT/WPC/SPC products in large part to promote their own private-label brands. Jeff Hamar, president of Galleher, a top 20 distributor from Santa Fe Springs, Calif., which sources from China, said he would be very surprised if flooring is ever involved in the tariffs. "There are already duties on wood flooring produced in China so, in

theory, the government is already adjusting those prices to reflect market realities," he said. "If they were to go after rigid LVT flooring the argument would be that there is so little

U.S. domestic capacity, who are they harming? Clearly, any duty would be passed onto the consumer and would result in higher prices. Duties on LVT would cut the gap between wood and

LVT possibly helping wood flooring sales."

Jonathan Train, CEO of Houston-based Swiff-Train Co., which also sources extensively from Asia, is clearly not an advocate for excessive tariffs. "Small tariffs that are clearly understood and fairly implemented are fine and do not block trade," he said.

"Plus, they add a reasonable means of revenue for the government. But larger, volatile and retroactive tariffs disrupt markets unnecessarily and do not fix anything."

Many economists see a trade war as little more than punishing the other country rather than protecting domestic producers. Some flooring executives have similar views. "Unfortunately, it's going to be a 'tit for tat' kind of game that we can't afford to play," said Olga Robertson, president of the FCA Network. "Imagine just for one second if Walmart couldn't fill their stores with goods—it would be Armageddon."



Industry executives argue that any trade war between economic powers would ultimately result in a slowdown of the world economy.

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FCICA**Continued from page 1**

owned a contracting business at one time and I understand the value of education," said David Altman, director of research and development, Metroflor. "CIM is a good program, one of the best things FCICA has going for it. To manage a project is a different art all together."

J.R. Allred, general manager for Dalton Carpet One Floor & Home, Athens, Ga., concurred. "There really isn't anything like it in the industry," he said. "What it really is, is a certified project manager program."

Newberry said he knew it would take time for CIM to grow because in the beginning FCICA was doing all the marketing. But, he noted, it was an effort worth pursuing. "We made CIM our No. 1 priority; we staked our claim to this program. It is a risk when you say you're going to hang your hat on something, but you have to lead with your heart and have faith."

The growth of the CIM program has coincided with an uptick in overall membership. Newberry said credit goes to the entire FCICA family as well as

Dave Dumoulin, left, director of sales for RFMS, discusses the MeasureMobile3 program with Doug Coombs and Summer Brittain of DCO Commercial Floors during the FCICA trade show.

membership chairman Pat Kelly, who has

worked diligently to get the word out and recruit. In the past year, FCICA has attended both the Starnet and FUSE conferences and signed up additional members. It should be noted FCICA isn't poaching members from these associations but rather encouraging individuals or companies to add FCICA to their ledger. As Newberry explained, "It's not either this association or that association. It's about all of us getting better as an industry."

FCICA's Successors group of under 40-year-old leaders is another example of solid growth. Three years ago, Successors was merely an idea. Today it has 33 members and counting. "This is an important



group because if we don't take steps now to bring the next set along we'll be doomed," Newberry said. "The more really good people you have, the better off you are."

Fortunately for FCICA, it has many good people willing to invest their time to enhance the association. "Again, it speaks to this group because volunteer positions can go one of two ways. You can have a title and then show up to a meeting once in a while, or you can take the title seriously and make things happen. We could have Kim [Oderkirk, the executive director] do all the work, or we could all take part and pitch in, and that is what we did with this group."

marketing mastery

How to convert more door swings into sales

(First of two parts)

We've been advertising with Angie's List and Home Advisor, and running Google AdWords," a dealer from Colorado said during a meeting about additional ways to market his business.

I asked him what his monthly ad spend was and he said about \$6,000. I followed up by asking how many walk-ins out of 10 wind up purchasing, and he said three.

"Before you spend additional money trying to attract more traffic, you need to do a better job converting the traffic you already have," I said. "If you simply increased your close rate from three out of 10 to four, that's a 30% increase in revenue with zero additional marketing."

I've had similar conversations with other flooring retailers. Many dealers who want to increase their revenue jump immediately to increasing their advertising spend and too often this is premature.

BY INCREASING THE AMOUNT OF REPEAT AND REFERRED CUSTOMERS VISITING YOUR STORE, YOU'LL AUTOMATICALLY INCREASE YOUR CLOSED SALES.

In reality, many dealers can increase their revenue significantly by simply closing more of the people who are already walking through their front door. I work with dealers who have increased their closed sales to seven out of 10 walk-ins, and who get a 90% close rate on jobs they quote. These kinds of close ratios require the implementation of strategies specifically designed to increase closed sales.

Here are some key strategies for making this happen.

Repeat and referred customers

"Can you tell the difference between a referred customer and a stranger who visited your store because they saw an ad?" I asked a dealer at one of my training seminars.

Jim Armstrong specializes in providing turnkey marketing strategies for flooring retailers. For a free copy of his latest book, "How Floor Dealers Can Beat the Boxes Online," visit BeatTheBoxesOnline.com.



JIM AUGUSTUS ARMSTRONG

"Definitely," she replied. "A referral already trusts us. We really don't have to 'sell' them like we would a stranger." Other dealers in the audience agreed.

When someone has purchased from you before or they were referred, they come in your store with pre-built trust. In general, they are less price-sensitive, the buying cycle is shorter and the closed sale ratio tends to be higher than with strangers.

Dealers I work with who get 70% to 80% close ratios do so in part by increasing their number of repeat and referred customers. By increasing the amount of repeat and referred customers visiting your store,

you'll automatically increase your closed sales—even if you don't do any additional sales training.

The most powerful way to increase the number of repeat and referred customers walking through your

door is by marketing to your database with a monthly newsletter and a weekly e-newsletter. I've seen dealers come back from the brink of bankruptcy, triple their revenue in a couple of years and even open additional stores. They did other things as well, but marketing to their database was the key driver.

You should also train your RSAs on how to generate referrals from your already-scheduled installations. When you've done a great job for a customer and they are thrilled with your service, it's very easy to get referrals. However, most dealers don't train their team on how to do this, and as a result they're leaving a fortune on the table.

In part two, I'll reveal additional key strategies for converting more door swings into sales.

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Guru USA looks to make a splash in North America

EUROPE-BASED WATERPROOF MEMBRANE

SUPPLIER SEEKS OPPORTUNITY FOR EXPANSION

By Mara Bollettieri

Guru USA knows a thing or two about waterproof membranes for ceramic tile flooring and wall installations. The Spain-based company brings more than 20 years of experience in the field of waterproofing membranes, shower drain systems and other accessories designed to advance installation performance and increase sales opportunities for its customers.

Derick Cooper, national sales and marketing manager of Guru USA, North America, stands behind its products as well as its focus on high-quality manufacturing. "We actually manufacture our own products. A lot of people in the waterproof membrane industry don't. We are proud to be a company that's supportive, approachable

and collaborative with our customers."

Already a household name in countries like Spain, Italy and France, to name a few, Guru USA wants to share its expertise with the North American market. The company's goal, according to Cooper, is to penetrate new territories by reaching out to wholesale distributors, dealers and contractors. Another potential avenue to market is through private-label manufacturing agreements with other suppliers.

In many cases, Guru USA is willing to take that extra step to keep customers happy by offering a variety of colors, different packaging and sizes of waterproof membranes—all at a competitive price, according to Cooper. "We can sell to anybody because we make it, so that makes us different. We can

customize our products."

Guru's Water-Stop waterproofing membrane, which touts both strength and flexibility, can be used with polymer-modified thinsets in steam showers and as a crack isolation membrane. How it works: The membrane is applied to both the walls and floors using thinset, and the tile is joined directly to the membrane. According to Cooper, these products surpass the ANSI 118.12 and the ANSI 118.10 specifications for crack isolation and load bearing, respectively.

Cooper identified a few standout products such as Guru's Evolux Linear and square drains, which are made with marine-grade 316 stainless



Guru's Evolux Linear and square drains are made using marine-grade 316 stainless steel.



Guru's Water-Stop waterproofing membrane is installed below the tile surface in wet applications.

steel and known for its high-quality properties. The manufacturer's innovative open set drain flashing system also allows the contractor to install the drain over remaining floor tile, which helps cut demolition costs.

"Our open set drain system is patented; it has an up-and-down movement, so it can adjust to any height over any shower floor," Cooper explained.

Guru's high-performance membranes not only exceed specifications, according to Cooper, but they are also priced competitively. This allows retailers to earn higher margins on their installation projects. "When I look at all the other membranes out there, our performance and quality is on the top level. But our pricing is not; it's more on the mid-level. So that is something we bring to the table."

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NWFA**Continued from page 3**

verifies the recipient's proficiency with a specific skill or area of expertise. This metadata includes information about the NWFA as the third-party issuer of the badge, the date the badge was earned, and the specific skill or knowledge that was exhibited—and confirmed through testing—for the individual to earn the badge. In addition, these badges become part of a life-long digital resume, which makes them especially convenient for attracting customers.

"NWFA uses its digital

badges to influence consumers who are looking for qualified flooring professionals," said Michael Martin, NWFA president and CEO. "For those members who engage with NWFA University, they move up in NWFA's consumer search feature as they participate in more training. Take a series of courses to earn a badge and bump up; take more courses to earn more badges and bump up again; earn certification and jump to the top of the list. This is the first time we've been able to offer our members a tangible return on training by verifying their skills with consumers looking for qualified contractors."

Attendees attest to the program's viability. Sean James, an NWFA University user, is a believer. As owner and operator of SJ Hardwoods in Santa Cruz, Calif., he has noticed a huge increase in his business since becoming involved with hands-on and online training through the NWFA. "I get a lot of work through being part of the NWFA," he said. "Most conversations start with, 'I found your name through the NWFA website,' or 'I noticed all of the digital badges on your website and want to hire you.' There is never a question of cost. Customers want someone they can trust who will take all the right steps

to ensure a quality job."

The success of the program is such that major manufacturers are taking notice—and getting involved. Last year, NWFA launched a partnership with Mohawk Flooring after the supplier adopted NWFA University into the Mohawk University program to fulfill wood floor training for its customers.

"Mohawk is pleased to be working with the NWFA in providing our valued retail partners with best-in-class training focused on successfully selling, positioning and installing Mohawk's hard surface products," said Susan Hahn, Mohawk's director of new busi-

ness development, at the time. "We look forward to growing this partnership throughout 2017 as we bring value to the marketplace and to our customers through this integrated training program."

NWFA's goal is to build on the program, updating the training curriculum as it evolves. "Our mission at NWFA is to develop educational opportunities for our members and provide them with the knowledge they need to achieve their goals," Owen explained. "We're looking forward to achieving more growth as we continue to develop courses and expand our reach."

NWFA awards wood studies scholarship

ST. LOUIS, Mo.—The National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA) has chosen Autumn Liles, a high school senior in Mena, Ark., as the recipient of the 2018 NWFA Education & Research Foundation (NERF) Wood Studies Scholarship.

This nonrenewable scholarship in the amount of \$1,000 is awarded to a current high

school senior who plans to go on to study forestry, or forestry-related sciences, all in an effort to advance and

improve forestry practices for generations to come.

Liles will graduate from Mena High School this May with a 4.0 GPA and noteworthy honors for her extensive involvement in her school and home community. She was accepted into Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Okla., and will study biology beginning this fall.

NERF was established to provide industry research and educate future generations of wood flooring professionals. Thanks to the generosity of its members, NWFA has conducted such research as the Life Cycle Analysis of Wood Flooring and awarded more than \$100,000 in scholarships since its creation.

To learn more about this scholarship opportunity and others offered by the organization, visit NWFA's scholarship page at nwfa.org/scholarships.aspx.

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