

volume 37/number 7 | fcnews.net | **the publication more retailers prefer** | September 13/20, 2021 | \$2.00

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Specialty retailers are looking to capitalize on carpet's resurgence, citing demand for higher-end goods, stylish patterns and vibrant colors.

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DIGITAL ACCESS IS INCLUDED

See our latest issue at fcnews.net



KEY SELLING SEASON TOUTS HOT NEW PRODUCTS

By Megan Salzano

With the pandemic shaking up product launch strategies, the fall selling season has become a key product launch phase for many suppliers. While Surfaces remains the main stage for most manufacturers, new products are hitting the streets—and dealer showrooms—this fall that have never been seen before.

New product offerings for the 2021 fall selling season cover all categories, from carpet to rigid core to laminate, wood and tile. These new products boast innovative technologies and next-gen designs ideal for a wide variety of consumer needs.

Coverage starts on page 18.

Retail outlook

Forecast calls for robust flooring sales to persist

By Ken Ryan

Nothing—not a global supply chain slowdown, labor shortage or delta variant—has put a crimp in sales for flooring dealers as they enter the fall season with gale-force winds at their backs. Multiple retailers say they are up double digits in 2021 vs. 2020, and for many 2020 was their historical high-water mark for sales. That is, until the calendar flipped to 2021.

Flooring dealers who are reporting 20%, 40% and even 50% increases in 2021 are not outliers in this market as the COVID-19-induced rally that began in earnest in May 2020 continues unabated. And it's not just sales that are up. Across the board, higher tickets have led to a bump in gross profit margins for

many of them.

"Our numbers for 2021 vs. 2020—or even 2019—are up by a large margin," said Lauren Voit, president of Great Western Flooring in Naperville, Ill. In



At Ted's Abbey Carpet, revenues through August are up 9% over 2020.

fact, business activity at Great Western was so brisk that Voit was forced to shut off all tile installation sales to the public

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Broadlume purchases Retail Lead Management

By Steven Feldman

Broadlume, parent company of industry-leading technology services providers FloorForce and Creating Your Space, has purchased Retail Lead Management (RLM), the leading CRM company founded by Jason Goldberg

in 2017. Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed, but Broadlume adds about 2,000 accounts to its network, giving it about 3,000 locations using its software platform.

Todd Saunders, CEO of Broadlume, told FCNews in an exclusive interview that there were two reasons for the deal. "The first is we want to provide flooring retailers with an all-in-one solution, integrating their digital marketing and website data with their client data," he said. "This will give retailers unique insight into their businesses so they can better understand ROI. Since we started the business, customers have been asking us to build this all-in-one platform, and a CRM is a huge step toward this."



Jason Goldberg



Todd Saunders

ers just opening their first store, all the way to stores with many locations."

The fact that Goldberg has built America's Floor Source in Columbus, Ohio, into a \$130 million operation did not go unnoticed in the decision to purchase RLM. "While we have people who have worked in flooring stores and in manufacturing, we have no one who has built a business of this scale from the ground up," Saunders said. "Jason has done that, so his coming to this team will increase our perspective of not only what dealers do today, but also what should they be doing moving forward. We're big proponents of listening to our customers and learning their day-to-day pain

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(IN THE NEWS)**Galleher acquires Trinity Hardwood Distributors**

SANTA FE SPRINGS, CALIF.—Galleher, one of the top five flooring distributors in the U.S., has acquired Trinity Hardwood Distributors. Founded in 1977, Trinity is one of the largest suppliers of hardwood in Texas, with locations in every major Texas metroplex. Given the strength and longevity of the Trinity brand name in Texas, the company will maintain the essence of its brand and will be known as Trinity Hardwood, A Galleher Company.



"The addition of Trinity Hardwood to the Galleher family is a tremendously important step in Galleher's long-term goal of expanding our geographic coverage to better serve the needs of our growing customer base," said Ted Kozikowski, president and CEO of Galleher. "Trinity is a dominant player in Texas, and we are confident Jon Roy Reid (founder of Trinity Hardwood), and his team will play a critical role contributing to Galleher's future growth objectives."

Registration opens for 2022 regional Market Maker Events

MARIETTA, GA.—Online registration is now open for the 2022 Flooring Markets: Atlanta, Dallas and Biloxi. The markets are scheduled for Jan. 6-7 at AT&T Stadium, Arlington, Texas; Jan. 26-27 at the Cobb Galleria Centre, Atlanta; and Feb. 17-18 at the Mississippi Coast Convention Center, Biloxi, Miss.



The 2022 markets will continue to adhere to local, state and facility guidelines as well as CDC recommendations to ensure safety is top of mind.

"We look forward to welcoming attendees and exhibitors back to our markets in 2022," said Lori Kisner, managing partner, MME. "Our industry depends on face-to-face contact to source and present new products as well as strengthen business relationships. Our market sanitation and safety standards will remain in place and be updated as required."

Starnet cancels 2021 live events

COLUMBUS, OHIO—The Starnet board of directors has voted to cancel live events scheduled for the remainder of 2021. The decision was made due to uncertain local conditions changing at the host cities, which negatively impacts the member and vendor attendee experience, the group said.

Live events canceled for the balance of 2021 include:

- Starnet Floorcare: Sept. 22-24
- Starnet Specifier and Business Development Seminar: Oct. 1-4
- Starnet Annual Meeting: Oct. 21-23

"Despite the cancellations, Starnet offers many programs to elevate the success of our members and vendors," said Mark Bischoff, president and CEO. "Last year, we launched several new innovative programs designed to enhance the success and profitability of our members."

Updates on 2022 events will follow.

news**Republic expands logistics capabilities**

By Reginald Tucker

Republic Floor continues to expand its logistics capabilities as part of a strategy to better serve customers nationwide via not only ample product availability but also warehousing and transportation services. Just last week, the company received 10 new Peterbilt tractor "sleepers," bringing its fleet to 75 units.

The milestone, according to Rotem Eylor, Republic Floor CEO, is especially significant given the challenges most suppliers are facing in getting products to customers quickly and reliably. "The market in general is very challenging today; you cannot get any orders for almost any materials—it doesn't matter where," Eylor told FCNews. "If you try to order a tractor trailer today, you won't get any date or commitment from the manufacturers. We were able to secure supply a couple years ago, ahead of all this, when we partnered with Peterbilt, which is the Rolls Royce of tractor trailers. We made a strategic deal with them for the next five years. It's the same approach to planning that we take with anything we do with the company."

Not one to rest on its laurels, Republic Floor is not done building its national trucking fleet by any means. The goal over the next five to seven years, according to



Republic Floor recently received 10 new Peterbilt tractor sleepers—one of which was delivered to its Houston distribution center.

Eylor, is to add another 75 tractor trailers. "That's double the amount we have now," he said.

Republic Floor's expansion of its trucking fleet is just one component—albeit a critical one—of its overarching go-to-market strategy. Over the past year and half, the company has been aggressively opening up distribution centers and warehouses in target markets across the U.S. The supplier has also purchased select floor covering distributors outright.

For Republic, it's not about sheer size and scale alone. Rather, the moves are cal-

culated based on those markets with the greatest growth potential. "It's about the long-term strategy of where we're going to be in five to seven years, and which locations we're going to open," Eylor said. "We're looking to add another 20 locations on top of what we already have today. We are also working to beef up existing locations."

Case in point is the Miami market, an area Republic Floor is looking to further penetrate. "We know we're going to need more trailers if we are going to handle dis-

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FCNews bolsters editorial team

HUNTINGTON, N.Y.—Floor Covering News has appointed Jacqueline Hinchcliffe as its new associate editor and digital media coordinator. In this dual role, she will be responsible for a variety of tasks, including: crafting news stories and feature articles; copyediting and proofreading content; and attending industry trade shows and events. Moreover, she will provide assistance in content creation for the FCNews website while helping engage the magazine's audience across its various social media channels.

Prior to joining FCNews, Hinchcliffe was the co-editor of GWS Gazette, where she had a hand in everything from interviewing sources and writing articles to page layout and author recruitment. Before that, she served as staff writer for Do North magazine as well as the Cardinal Points Newspaper. She also has experience

as a fashion blog writer. On the digital side, Hinchcliffe oversaw the website rebranding and social media promotional activities of Alpha Phi Sorority. She also served as director of the organization's external events.

"Jacqui comes to FCNews with not only proven journalistic skills and experience, but she also brings a positive, enthusiastic attitude and a strong work ethic," said Reginald Tucker, managing editor. "She's a quick learner and possesses an inquisitive mind—traits that will help her get acclimated to the flooring industry. She also has experience in retail merchandising, which is relevant to the position."



Jacqueline Hinchcliffe

Hinchcliffe is eager to hit the ground running. "I'm excited to join such a dedicated and highly skilled team at FCNews, and I look forward to learning from a group with years of experience in the flooring industry," she said. "While this industry is fairly new to me, I'm always eager to learn from those around me so I can continue to excel. I'm hopeful that my passion for journalism and unique writing style will bring a new perspective and voice to the publication."

Hinchcliffe earned a Bachelor's Degree in magazine journalism with a concentration in broadcasting from the State University of New York at Plattsburgh. While there she studied news writing, reporting and digital publishing.

SNAPSHOT**Flooring leaders participate in charity golf event for Tunnel to Towers Foundation**

WESTLAND, MICH.—The annual Carl & Fran Francavilla Charity golf outing benefiting the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation was held here last month. Hosted by Cathy Buchanan and Independent Carpet One Floor & Home, the event featured 132 golfers with participants from throughout the flooring industry.

"Over the last few years, we have raised over \$100,000 for the Tunnel to Towers Foundation and we are proud to announce that we are adding another \$30,000 from this year's event," Buchanan said.

Shown here is Buchanan (center), flanked from left by Shaw executives Chanel Clifford, John Tighe, Welton Davison and Steve Sieracki.





my take

Tribute to a friend

I hate obituaries. I find them to be boring. Then again, they're not designed to be riveting. They're simply obligatory summations of one's life from beginning to end. Less about the legacy they left. Is that how you would want to be memorialized?

I'm going to go out on a limb here: Steve Joss would not. For those of you who hadn't heard, Steve, longtime owner of The Vertical Connection in Columbia, Md., passed away two weeks ago at the age of 72. He died of lung cancer—not kidney cancer. That's because a 25-year-old named Jes Smothers had donated a kidney to Steve, which prolonged his life until earlier this month. More on that later.

Steve was a friend, and if I know him the way I think I do, he would want these words to be a tribute to who he was, how he lived his life, the impact he had on people and the example he set for us all. Let's call it a life well lived.

First and foremost, his wife Kathy. They had the storybook marriage—49 years, 11 months and a week. For those scoring at home, that's three weeks shy of 50 years. Kathy was his best friend and he would always tell me how I needed to find my "Kathy." His son, Adam, would say at his funeral how he couldn't go more than an hour without communicating with her. Together they survived her breast cancer 20 years ago, and I know that only served to make their marriage stronger. In a world where divorce claims half of all marriages and another 25% would probably be better off pulling the plug, he showed the world what marriage was meant to be.

His kids, Adam and Lauren. His relationship with them was a blueprint I would want to steal from him when I eventually had children—although I really didn't steal it; he handed it to me on a silver platter. When I first met Steve in the late '90s, I was fascinated by the fact his 20-something-year-old kids would choose to spend New Year's Eve with their parents rather than their friends. He taught us all the definition of family. (By the way, my son and his girlfriend chose to spend last New Year's Eve with me—funny how a Florida trip will do that. Steve would have been proud.)

Back then, I remember how he couldn't stop talking about Lauren's high-profile job at Eli Lilly. So proud how much they valued her. Adam, too. Even when the two of them started working side by side at The Vertical Connection and Adam, as a general, would frustrate the hell out of him with his generation's way of doing business. They would butt heads but, in the end, Steve would quietly admit to me how well Adam was running the business.

His customers. Talk to Adam and

Lauren, and they will tell you that The Vertical Connection was his third child. Then they will admit the business was really his first child. I don't know how many customers Steve had over the years, but if just one was dissatisfied it would have killed him. He taught this industry that good customer service is everything.

Health issues. Steve had MS. Steve had back surgery. Steve had cancer. Steve was on dialysis three days a week until he got that kidney. Through it all, he never complained. Not once. In fact, Steve would never complain—unless the restaurant messed up his order or his food was cold. But only then. "I don't mean to complain, but..." Steve taught us that complaining gets you nowhere and you may as well make lemonade out of lemons.

Perseverance in the face of adversity. I mentioned that Steve had MS. You'll never meet anyone who kicked that disease's ass like Steve. When walking got too tough, he got a scooter. When stairs were too tough, he built an extension onto the house so the bedroom could be moved downstairs. He taught us how it's never about the problem, it's only about the solution.

Attitude. I challenge anyone who ever asked Steve how he was doing to remember a time when his answer was anything but "great." Business was always great. Kathy was always great. The kids were always great. The new restaurant he tried last night was great. He always felt great, especially after that kidney gave him a new lease on life.

Wisdom. Steve liked to offer advice—solicited or not. He always wanted to help. About 20 years ago, when I was with *Floor Covering Weekly*, Steve approached me about writing a

column. He felt he could offer insight to his fellow retailers. I agreed, and we called it "From the Front Lines," or something like that. He co-authored it with his best friend, Ron Katz, who formerly ran Harry Katz Carpet One on Long Island. Ron was the politically correct one; Steve wanted to tell it like it was. He felt retailers needed to know the real story. Steve also was appointed to the board of Howard Community College. He liked nothing more than mentoring young kids.

A personal note: Who knew that a column in *FCNews* three years ago would forever change the lives of three people. The column was about Steve, and the purpose was threefold: to show the world that money does not necessarily buy you health; griping gets you nowhere; and in times of adversity you have two choices—feel sorry for yourself or cling to hope. The column resulted in an email from Jes Smothers wanting to donate his kidney. As it turned out, Jes and Steve were not a match. But Jes' willingness to donate a kidney allowed Steve to receive one from the kidney bank. And Jes' kidney? A 12-year-old boy's life was saved and is now living a life he otherwise would not be.

At the end of the day, it really doesn't matter that Steve was born in Queens, or he drag raced on the road near Kennedy Airport, or that he lived in Maryland. What matters is the legacy he left, the impact he had on others and how he made the world a better place. He touched many people in ways in which he will never be forgotten. That's how you live forever.

Steven Feldman

GETTING SOCIAL WITH fcnews

Flooring Markets · August 24 at 11:42 AM · Published by Hosttrule

Despite a host of potential roadblocks—flationary pressure, the Delta variant, ongoing supply-chain slowdowns and a lack of installers—flooring retailers, for the most part, continue to report strong business activity through early August. Learn more: <https://bit.ly/3kA17pH>

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Resilient Floor Covering Institute · 1,043 followers · 1 yr · Excellent interviews and perspectives from leading resilient manufacturers. Bravo @resilientfc for your coverage! To read the full article: <https://bit.ly/3kA17pH>

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The opinions expressed by columnists do not necessarily reflect the views of management. Single copy \$2 U.S. subscriptions \$25/yr. Canadian subscriptions \$50 U.S./yr.
Foreign via air \$200 U.S./yr,
foreign via surface \$100 U.S./yr. Printed in the U.S.A.

postmaster

Send address changes to FLOOR COVERING NEWS, subscription Dept., 821 West Jericho Tpke., Ste. 2C, Smithtown, NY 11787

Floor Covering News (ISSN-10794174) is published biweekly by Roel Productions Inc., 33 Walt Whitman Road, Suite 302, Huntington Station, NY 11746. Periodicals postage paid at Hicksville, NY, and additional mailing offices.



Speakers lined up for NAFCD+NBMDA convention

CHICAGO—The 2021 NAFCD + NBMDA Annual Convention, scheduled to take place Nov. 2–4 at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas, has unveiled its roster of guest speakers for the event. Conference attendees will hear from an impressive lineup of authorities and leading-edge thinkers who will discuss the latest trends in leadership, economics, marketing, sales and technology.

The speakers are as follows:

Brian Beaulieu, CEO and chief economist at ITR Economics. Beaulieu, a peren-

nial favorite among NAFCD attendees, will deliver a presentation that focuses on the opportunities and risks ahead in terms of government initiatives, consumer trends, market opportunities, labor issues and production costs.

Dirk Beveridge, founder of UnleashWD and a leading advocate of change and innovation in distribution, will share inspirational stories and lessons from the COVID-19 era. Meanwhile, Scott Klososky, a founding partner of Future Point of View, will help attendees gain a clear pic-

ture of the future of cybersecurity.

Mike Regan, president of TranzAct Technologies, will help attendees identify the inefficiencies in their supply chains and how they can be corrected; while Robert Tucker, founder and president of Innovation Resource Consulting Group, plans to touch on the driving forces of change.

Lastly, Christopher Wallace, president and co-founder of



InnerView Group, a marketing consulting firm, plans to use his expertise to help distribution partners understand how customer expectations have

changed during the pandemic and the overall power of customer experience.

To register for NAFCD, visit distributorconvention.org.

OBITUARY

Steven Joss, 72

Steven Joss, who together with his wife, Kathy, started The Vertical Connection in 1977, has passed away. He was 72.



Joss held a variety of leadership positions in the home interior or industry, having served on the boards of the World Floor Covering Association and the Maryland Floorcovering Association. In the community, he was a member of the Howard County Board of Consumer Affairs, the Columbia Patuxent Rotary and the Maryland Elevator Safety Review Board.

Most recently, Joss served on the Howard County Equal Business Opportunity Commission. He also was a mentor and volunteer for Score, a non-profit association to help develop businesses and provide practical action plans for individuals seeking to become business professionals. Joss was also on the board of trustees of Howard Community College.

In recent years, his son, Adam, has taken on more of the day-to-day operations of The Vertical Connection. The retailer has served the home interior needs of Howard County, Md., residents for more than 43 years.

Joss is survived by his wife, Kathy; his children, Lauren Topf (Daniel) and Adam Joss (Adrienne); his grandchildren, Samantha, Jordan and Ella Topf, Max and Olivia Joss; and his brother-in-law Jim Tupp (Susan).

Services were held Sept. 9. Contributions in his memory may be sent to Temple Isaiah, 12200 Scaggsville Road, Fulton, Md., 20759; or Howard Community College Educational Foundation (HCCEF) <https://howardcc.edu/stevejoss>.

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educating the industry

What today's consumers really want

BY GREGG HICKS

Whether you are a flooring retailer or contractor, it's important to have a good sense of where our market is and where it is headed. To that end, it is beneficial to step back from your perspective and take an objective view of the flooring marketplace.

At Modernize, we strive to better connect homeowners with home improvement professionals. As part of that effort, we regularly send thousands of surveys to homeowners to learn what they're interested in, where they get information and how they choose their project partners. Here's what we learned from some of our recent surveys.

1. Nearly a third of homeowners polled plan to invest in floors.

We recently took a sample of 5,000 people to find out more about their flooring plans, asking: "Do you plan to renovate the flooring in any part of your home in the next 12 months?" Thirty-two percent responded "yes."

The takeaway: The good news is a solid chunk of homeowners who are planning to invest in home improvements see flooring as important.

2. A quarter of those polled expect to spend up to \$5,000 on flooring. For the homeowners who responded that they expected to invest in flooring in the coming year, we asked about their budget plans. Following are the results:

- 56% responded "less than \$2,500"
- 26% responded "between \$2,501 and \$5,000"
- 2% responded "more than \$5,000"
- 15% were unsure

The takeaway: Our research shows more than 15% of your prospects are likely to claim they do not know their budget. When that happens, inform them of recent statistics or personal experiences that you have had with



similar homeowners.

3: Bamboo is gaining in popularity. After asking respondents who plan to invest in flooring, we then inquired about preferred materials. While only 5% currently have bamboo flooring, 12% of homeowners said they plan to invest in bamboo.

Furthermore, we asked homeowners what flooring products they planned to install in their home. Survey said:

- Carpet: 17% (vs. 30% currently installed)
- Hardwood: 16% (20% currently installed)
- Laminate: 16% (compared to 12% currently installed)
- Bamboo: 12% (vs. 5% having bamboo floors currently installed)
- Tile: 11% (16% currently installed)
- Vinyl: 6% (7% currently installed)
- Linoleum: 5% (7% currently installed)
- Unsure: 15%

The takeaway: Retailers should take advantage of opportunities to promote bamboo in their showrooms and on their websites.

4. Consumers want education on flooring types. In our latest survey of respondents who said they are planning a flooring project, homeowners identified the content/information they said would be most helpful ahead of their flooring project. Thirty-six percent responded, "flooring costs and budgeting," while 33% said they "want more information about flooring types, especially pros/cons." Ten percent said they want information on "installation and how to continue to care for flooring," while 5% said they want more information on flooring contractors.

The takeaway: Clearly, homeowners want to be informed. We recommend you create your own comparison/buying guide for the floors you carry.

Gregg Hicks is vice president of Modernize, which helps homeowners navigate a wide range of home improvement projects. He has 20 years of experience across web analytics, SEO, social, SE and affiliate marketing.

RETAILERS REACT

In what way has the housing boom impacted your business?



Flooring retailers say residential remodel has remained red hot in their markets.

"We do quite a bit of residential renovation work and that has been exceedingly busy for us. We are having to ramp up our staffing efforts. It's great to have such a boom, when/if you can get the material."

We would prefer it to be spread out a little, but you gotta make hay while the sun shines.

—Sam Locher, A.J. Rose Carpets & Flooring
Burlington, Mass.

"The housing boom has had a huge impact on the remodel/replacement business in our area. In spite of the much higher cost of goods this year, the demand is still very strong."

—Bill Zeigler,
Charles F. Zeigler & Sons
Hanover, Pa.

"The housing boom has had a terrific impact on our business. We have been extremely busy the last six months and have a nice backlog of work. Obtaining materials continues to be an issue, and I am looking forward to that working itself out over the next several months."

—Ryan Commerce, Indoor City
Lancaster, Pa.

"We have massive growth in our area on new homes and resales, and consumers want their own personal touch with new flooring. We have been consistently busy for the last two years even with COVID-19 looming as we have many new residents moving to the area with our loose restrictions in Florida. Our business has grown over 20% year to date, and we hired several new installation crews to help with the growth."

—Missy Montgomery, Montgomery's CarpetsPlus ColorTile
Venice, Fla.

"The housing boom has been a constant stimulator for business. For us, it has been primarily with existing real estate either being prepared for listing or immediately after closing, with buyers looking to put their own look into their new home."

—John Bretzloff, Barefoot Flooring
Castle Hill, N.C.

POINTS OF INTEREST

► **The National Association of Home Builders (NAHB)** reported that residential construction continued to shift toward the suburbs and lower-cost markets. The trend is especially high in the multifamily sector, according to the NAHB's latest Home Building Geography Index (HBGI). During the second quarter of 2021, multifamily construction posted double-digit percentage gains in small metro core and suburban areas, while large metro areas experienced a decrease for multifamily building activity. "Lower land and labor costs and lower regulatory burdens in suburban and exurban markets make it more appealing to build in these communities," said Chuck Fowke, NAHB chairman.



► **Pending home sales** declined for the second consecutive month, the National Association of Realtors (NAR) reported. The Pending Home Sales Index (PHSI) declined 1.8% to 110.7 in July. Year-over-year, signings fell 8.5%. An index of 100 is equal to the level of contract activity in 2001. The index is a forward-looking indicator of home sales based on contract signings. "The market may be starting to cool slightly, but at the moment there is not enough supply to match the demand from would-be buyers," said Lawrence Yun, NAR's chief economist. "That said, inventory is slowly increasing, and home shoppers should begin to see more options in the coming months."

CALENDAR

Sept. 21-24

NWFA Inspector School & Test
Five-day course designed to prepare wood flooring professionals to become a wood flooring inspector, Chesterfield, Mo. Contact: education@nwfa.org; 800.422.4556

Sept. 22

19th annual Alan Greenberg Charity Golf Tournament
Barnsley Gardens Resort, Adairsville, Ga. Funds raised help support the mission of the FCIF. Contact: Paula Holt, pholt@ccglobal.com; 800.466.6984 ext. 1101; fcif.org/alan-greenberg-charity-golf-tournament

Sept. 28-30

NWFA 2021 Intermediate Sand & Finish + CP Testing
Three-day course includes in-depth training on general equipment maintenance and sanding multiple flooring types, Denver. Contact: education@nwfa.org; 800.422.4556

Oct. 3-6

National Floorcovering Alliance
Fall conference, Fiesta Americana Los Cabos, Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. Contact: Lisa Browning, 941.877.1632; lisa_browning@comcast.net; nationalflooringalliance.com

Oct. 4-6

NeoCon 2021
Annual contract flooring trade show, theMART, Chicago. Contact: Alexandra Zwicky, alexandra@novitapr.com; 774.247.4004; neocon@xpress-reg.net

Oct. 8-11

Alliance Flooring
2021 Family Reunion (annual convention), Rosen Shingle Creek, Orlando, Fla. Contact: David Ellis, delli@carpetsplus.com; 423.954.1133; allianceflooring.net

POINTS OF INTEREST

► **Eighty percent of U.S. construction firms** are unable to fill open slots with qualified workers, including both hourly and salaried positions, a new report showed. Despite the fact that companies are raising wages to compete in a strengthening labor market, most firms reported having a harder time filling open jobs over the past year when compared with years prior, according to a survey from Autodesk and the Associated General Contractors of America. The problem is increasing across the country and at firms of all sizes. Overall, there were 263,000 job openings in the industry as of July, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The worker shortage is impacting the cost and duration of projects, as well as the price of properties.

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International Certified Flooring Installers convention

Evolution includes first-timers, 20-somethings

By Ken Ryan

ORLANDO, FLA.—Twice postponed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the International Certified Flooring Installers (CFI) met here for the first time since 2019, and the turnout and response exceeded the expectations of many in attendance.

Of the 175 attendees, 73 were first timers, a testament to the evolution of the organization, according to Robert Varden, executive director. "In the [early years], if we got 100-plus to come to the event that would be good," he told FCNews. "Then the number was 120, 140, 150 and so on—and it's not just the number of people here, it is the kind of people who are here and their involvement. The response has been phenomenal."

The conference included several younger installers (30 and under), precisely the demographic CFI—and the greater flooring industry—has been trying to attract during the ongoing shortage.

Among the new kids attending convention were four family members (all 30 and under) of Mr. Wright Flooring, based in Jacksonville, Fla. Founded in 2012 by then 21-year-old Marquis Wright, the installation company has earned praise from customers for their craftsmanship and courteous demeanor. Wright's introduction to the trade came quite innocently. "One day, my next-door neighbor came to me and asked if I would work for \$70 a day," Wright told FCNews. "I was down for that."

Wright, 30, recalled one job that sealed the deal for him as an installer. "I saw the finished product and was so proud of it—more proud, I thought, than the customer would be. But then the customer saw it and started crying because she was so excited. That was an amazing experience. I love that I get to use my hands and can make something."

Wright's team includes brother, Jakhari, who is 25; and cousins, Ricky Robinson, 30, and Shavazz Robinson, 29. Shavazz has been installing for six years. "At first, I didn't think I was going to continue [with installation]. At the time I was just looking for a check." Over time, he said he started enjoying the craft, especially being able to create something and seeing how the floors come



Robert Varden, executive director of CFI, said convention turnout was 'phenomenal.'



Members of Mr. Wright Flooring, from left: Ricky Robinson, Marquis Wright, president/CEO; Jakhari Wright and Shavazz Robinson.

together. "That was cool," he added.

Evolution of CFI

For most of its history, CFI has provided training and certification to installers throughout the industry. While it still does that, recruiting new installers has become a critical objective of the association. Perhaps CFI's best example of recruiting is through Build My Future-Flooring Edition. The first meeting in Plano, Texas, two years ago drew 118 high-school-age kids, many of whom were learning about the flooring installation trade for the first time. (COVID-19 sidelined last year's scheduled event.) Based on the program's success, Build My Future is looking to branch out to other U.S. cities. "We learned that you have to be interactive, you have to engage with the kids," Varden explained. "We found that kids enjoyed working with their hands and liked building stuff with their own hands."

Varden said a high school graduate who successfully completes CFI's 5-week training course would be ready for employment anywhere in the U.S., at a starting salary of \$35,000 or more—with no college debt. Many high schools that had dropped shop classes are now offering construction programs, although most are not including flooring as part of their curriculum. Varden said he encouraged flooring professionals to get involved by

contacting their local high schools and making them aware of the opportunity in flooring installation.

Retailer-installer dynamic

One highlight of the CFI convention was a panel discussion between installers and retailers about their working relationships, which can sometimes become thorny. Dwayne Pruitt, president of Pruitt Home Services and a CFI installer/certifier, said he has felt installation "was always treated as a necessary evil. If that's still the case, then we have a lot of work still to do."

However, retailer panelists suggested the opposite is true. Mac McIlvried, vice president of operations for Empire Today, said he views his installers as the industry's lifeblood. "We know where our bread is buttered, and it is buttered on the installation side of the business," he noted.

In the same vein, Don Roberts, who owns five retail stores in Alabama and is secretary of the World Floor Covering Association (WFCA),

said they are inclusive when it comes to subcontractor installers and treat them just as they would regular employees. "Every company takes care of the salespeople because they are the revenue-generators, but we include our back-office people, installers, subs—everyone on our staff," Roberts explained. "When we have outings like Topgolf and the Mario Andretti Racing Experience, we invite our subs. My experience has been that subs want to go where they are treated well and, unfortunately, they are not treated well everywhere."

Scott Humphrey, CEO of the WFCA, who served as one of the moderators, had encouraging words for the installers in attendance. "You have never been more valuable to this industry than you are today, but make it shine. While it is often portrayed that the two sides—retailers and installers—are against each other, we need to work together."

One area that both sides agreed on is that it all comes down to customer satisfaction. "If my installers don't treat my

customers well, they won't work for me for long," Roberts said. He noted that he would rather employ courteous installers with average skills than an excellent technician who did not treat customers well.

Roland Thompson, who is uniquely positioned as both retailer and installer, said his company—Thompson Flooring in Frederick, Md.—calls the customer following the install to ask about the job and how the installers treated her. "We ask questions like, 'Did they clean up afterward?' 'Were they courteous?'" The ones who check the boxes are likely to get better compensated, he said.

Roberts said his idea of the perfect installer is one who leaves the customer satisfied. "Also, it's about trust. If they can only work three days a week, that is fine—work those three days," he said. "Don't say you can work three days and then show up for two days."

Asked about his vision of the perfect retailer, Alan Ellis, a 50-year installer, said simply, "A retailer that treats you like family."



One highlight of the CFI convention was a panel discussion involving retail store owners and installers.



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Jason Surratt shares his vision for Tarkett

Tarkett recently named industry-experienced Jason Surratt as president of its residential division. The appointment represents a departure from the revolving door of outside-the-industry presidents in recent times. Surratt, who brings a strong manufacturing and product back-

ground to Tarkett, was recently recognized by FCNews as one of 35 people under the age of 40 making their mark on this industry. Surratt recently sat down with FCNews publisher, Steven Feldman, to discuss the opportunity and task at hand.

Tell me about your career up until this point.

I've worked for most of the larger flooring companies, starting in the fibers division of Honeywell, then moving to the manufacturing side, starting in direct floor supervision for Shaw's commercial division at their carpet tile plant and working my way up through operations management. After venturing outside the flooring industry for about a year with an IT company, I came back to the flooring industry at Mohawk with product development on their commercial team. I was with them for about eight years in various roles, eventually taking over their custom design and development for commercial and hospitality. I left for a career growth opportunity with Phenix, where I was charged with their entire product development and design. Shortly after the Mannington acquisition, they wanted to split my role into two pieces—true category management P&L leadership and design. I thought having more of that true P&L ownership would be good for my career, learning more of the business side of things versus just the design and development aspect.

What makes this job attractive to you?

Well, for starters, Tarkett has an outstanding reputation in the industry. That, combined with the tremendous opportunity within their residential business, made this an extremely appealing position for me. The company has the pieces in place to make some big strides in residential, and I'm excited to be part of that journey.

Tarkett in the past has looked outside the flooring industry for leaders; their tenures often were not long. Is it fair to say Tarkett is better served by having someone who knows the industry in this leadership role?

Flooring is a very tricky industry to understand, specifically the intricacies of going to market and some of the things we do compared to other industries. I think it's very difficult for an outsider to understand, and it's a very strong, relationship-based market. So, having those relationships with those retailers and distributors—and understanding what's important to them—is a plus. I think retailers appreciate someone in

that role who understands the overall—from the nuts and bolts of how it's made to how it gets shipped and all the interactions in between. I think an insider could be more successful in this role because he's not trying to learn the company and the industry and the people underneath him. It's one less thing to learn.

You're a product and manufacturing guy. What skills do you bring to the table that will make a positive difference for Tarkett?

My overall flooring acumen through all the processes on the front-end prior to sale. Knowing how to efficiently make exciting new aesthetics and designs. And then just trying to bring more of that differentiation by voice of customer and understanding where the market's trending. We're going to build a strategy around our customers' wants and needs.

How involved will you be in sales and marketing?

My philosophy is to not try to micromanage and let my team and their talents shine through. I'll help lead and drive a strategy for where we want to go with the business, how we want to get there and I have a talented team well capable of executing in those functions.

How did you identify Tarkett's strengths and weaknesses as a competitor, and have your first few days here dispelled any of those impressions?

I didn't fully grasp our capabilities within our sundries business. In previous roles I may have been looking at this company more for the carpet, LVT and other hard surface categories. So I think that could be a key differentiator for us truly having a total flooring solution including the accessories business such as wall base. It's good that we have that entire portfolio to be a single source for our customers.

As a competitor to Tarkett, what did you believe to be this company's weaknesses?

I felt their overall carpet portfolio or presence in residential carpet could be stronger. I certainly felt where Lexmark once was, they



You come from Mannington, which always has a very strong presence at Surfaces. A lot of that has to do with Jay's Bargain Basement. Is that something that you would consider replicating?

As I said earlier, I'm trying to come in with a fresh set of eyes and not just focus on what I've done successfully in the past in other roles. That being said, it's certainly possible. We've had brief discussions this week, and it hasn't really been done in the past. I'm not sure yet of the reasoning for or against it in the past, but if we have the right opportunity and there are finished goods we could utilize, that's something that we'd look at replicating.

How does Tarkett compete under your leadership against the Shaws, Mohawks, Armstrongs and Manningtons of the world?

When you're up against the larger corporations, you're at a cost disadvantage. We know we're not going to compete on cost. So it's really about bringing unique, competitive advantages and differentiation to the market, be it systems or tools for the RSA, or unique aesthetics or innovative technologies within a product type that's at the forefront compared to other companies.

How will you help the retailer make money?

Having the right merchandising, having the right products, having the overall media and marketing and selling tools that make it easy for them to understand what the product's about, why it's unique and why they want to sell it to the customer. It's really creating a package that excites them.

Are you looking to add any high-level personnel?

Right now I am focused on understanding my team and our goals and drivers. We're going to work together to create a long-term strategy and continue to grow the business. Those activities will determine if and where we need to add roles throughout the residential business.

Talk about short- and long-term goals.

Over the short term, I want to understand who my team is and its strengths. I want to under-

stand our overall portfolio compared to our competition. And then understand our footprint in the marketplace and where we have opportunity to improve. I think there are some areas across the map where we don't have much brand presence. And we need to look at shoring that up and getting our name out in the field. Long-term, I have lofty goals where Tarkett is right there with all the bigger residential mills. We have to have a lot of growth to get there.

If I told you next year you were going to grow 10%, would you be satisfied?

I hope we grow more than that. With the way the residential market is trending and with the number of new house builds, I'd like to see us growing at a pace larger than the rest of the market and gain share.

I'm sure Tarkett is having supply chain issues as it relates to SPC. Any ideas you have in the short term to alleviate those issues?

We're evaluating every opportunity as we feel the same pressure everyone else is experiencing, from container availability to resin pricing issues. It's certainly the craziest market that I hope I only see once in my entire career.

Do you foresee making your own SPC domestically?

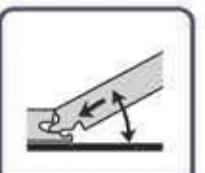
I think we have to grow our business to make it financially feasible and be cost effective. But, certainly seeing Tarkett's overall footprint and domestic LVT operations in commercial, I would assume we would prefer to manufacture our own goods if it allows us to be more competitive in the market. I would love at some point down the road to be large enough to do that.

If I put 12,000 retailers in this room and gave you five minutes, what would you tell them?

It would be selling them on the fact that I took this position because I'm excited about the opportunity. I'm excited about our team. I'm excited about the leadership above me at Tarkett. Everyone here is passionate about growing our business. And the only way we're going to do that is by helping retailers grow and make money.



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women of the flooring business



How fostering a family atmosphere builds business

BY SUSAN HADINGER

(Editor's note: Following is the ninth installment in a new series promoting Women of the Flooring Business, a social media group that provides members with a platform to share their experiences, observations and best practices.)

Hadinger's Flooring was founded 90 years ago by Tom Hadinger in Wisconsin. Tom eventually moved the business to Florida, where it sits today. Judy Hadinger joined the business 20 years ago and built the rug portion from nothing to more than 8,000 rugs in stock. Together they built a very strong business that I had the great fortune of joining 11 years ago. I started at the store working with Judy on the rug side of the business and then expanded to the flooring side as well.

I knew nothing about flooring when I started with Hadinger's but have loved the process of learning and growing

Ultimately, our goal is to provide the best service to our customers possible and this is fostered by our atmosphere.

We also have great relationships with our vendor partners. I say partners intentionally, as we work together to grow our business to the benefit of all. I feel fortunate to say that some of my best friends reside in this industry and I'm grateful to have friendships that coexist with work. Many of them are strong, talented women. Even though we are by far the minority right now, our numbers are growing quickly, and I expect that to continue.

In my opinion, it's not so much that women as a group bring something special to the table as it is that the specific women in leadership [positions] are just strong leaders. I am proud to be among this group and look to them often for perspective as well as support.

Anytime we can offer support and lift each other up, we benefit as a whole. I believe we've never had as many strong female leaders in this business as we do today. The door is open for young women to get a start in the flooring business and work their way up to the top.

As women leaders, we need to nurture this growth and be there for anyone looking to move up in this industry—especially other young women. The Women of the Flooring Business Group is a great example of support we can offer each other and will help women grow in this business. Any outlet where we can share ideas, successes and failures is a great resource and will provide many benefits to all of us.

IT'S NOT SO MUCH THAT WOMEN AS A GROUP BRING SOMETHING SPECIAL TO THE TABLE AS IT IS THAT THE SPECIFIC WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ARE JUST STRONG LEADERS.

into the job. I took over as CEO at the beginning of the pandemic and haven't looked back. We, like others, have had to make changes to adapt to the landscape. We are a leaner, smaller group in numbers but now we are more cohesive and focused than ever.

As we continue to evolve, our leadership team focuses more on our culture of family and service. We look after each other, and even squabble like family here. We like to give back to our people by planning fun outings and giving bonuses when business allows. We spend most of our time at work, so we believe it should be enjoyable. When customers come into our store, we believe they can sense what a great culture we have and how happy our co-workers are here.



Susan Hadinger is the CEO of Hadinger Flooring in Naples, Fla., where she lives with her 13-year-old son, Drew, and dog, Cody.

Specialty retailers pick their

By Ken Ryan

There are so many reasons why flooring retailers gravitate to carpet. For starters, carpet offers good margins, can be easily installed and is made in the USA—

meaning quicker turnaround times for specialty dealers.

Many veteran retailers recall fondly a time when carpet was their mainstay product—long before LVT emerged. These days, retailers are basking in the glow of carpet's

resurgence, with the residential sector growing double digits for the first time in recent memory, as higher-end goods, stylish patterns and vibrant colors resonate with homeowners.

Retailers chose some of their standout performers:



D Dream Weaver

CONFETTI III

About the product: Confetti III is a residential textured carpet from Dream Weaver, Engineered Floors' residential brand. Made from its proprietary PureColor soft solution-dyed BCF polyester, Confetti III features a lifetime stain-and fade-resistance warranty.

Retailer comment: "The PureColor [technology] of Dream Weaver's Confetti (and Natural Wonder) resonates with the customer for performance and stain resistance."

—Doug Bertrand, Carpetland USA, Davenport, Iowa



D Mohawk

SMARTSTRAND NATURAL ESSENTIALS

About the product: Available in 20 colors, Natural Essentials is CRI Green Label Plus certified and handles heavy foot traffic in style.

Retailer comment: "The SmartStrand fiber is incredibly soft and versatile with different looks. I particularly love that the stain resistance is not applied on the top but built into the fiber as in the case of Natural Essentials. Our customers love how it feels underfoot."

—Typhannie Watson, Carpeting by Mike, Somerset, Wis.



D Engineered Floors

WINNER'S CIRCLE I, II, III

About the product: From Engineered Floors' ResistA SoftStyle collection, this private-label brand of Carpet One provides a super soft carpet feel with spill resistance.

Retailer comment: "No. 1 in the Carpet One branded program would be Winner's Circle I, II, III. This product has value written all over it. From warranty, colors, style and performance, it is a worry-free product. Our customers love the feel. It's a product where price isn't the driving force to [making] sales."

—Cathy Buchanan, Independent Carpet One Floor & Home, Westland, Mich.



D Shaw Floors

COLOR THAT SPEAKS TO YOU

About the product: Color That Speaks To You is the reimagining of the Colorwall, a 20-year showroom anchor responsible for more than 40 million yards of carpet sales. The display features Designer Picks, an array of top-selling products that coordinate with popular paint colors and other high-performing soft surface selections.

Retailer comment: "Color That Speaks To You has dominated here for some time. The display is extremely magnetic and draws customers to it. It offers extremely wide color choices, featuring solids, subtle tones and accents. Two different face weights at two different price points creates a price choice."

—Steve Weisberg, Crest Flooring, Allentown, Pa.

star performers

► Anderson Tuftex

PARK HILL

About the product: The variegated speckles of color in Park Hill are achieved through a distinct process perfected by masters of the craft. Available in 18 colors. **Retailer comment:** "Tuftex has a great new product [Park Hill] that gives customers that upgraded product at great value."

—Eric Langan, Carpetland USA, Davenport, Iowa



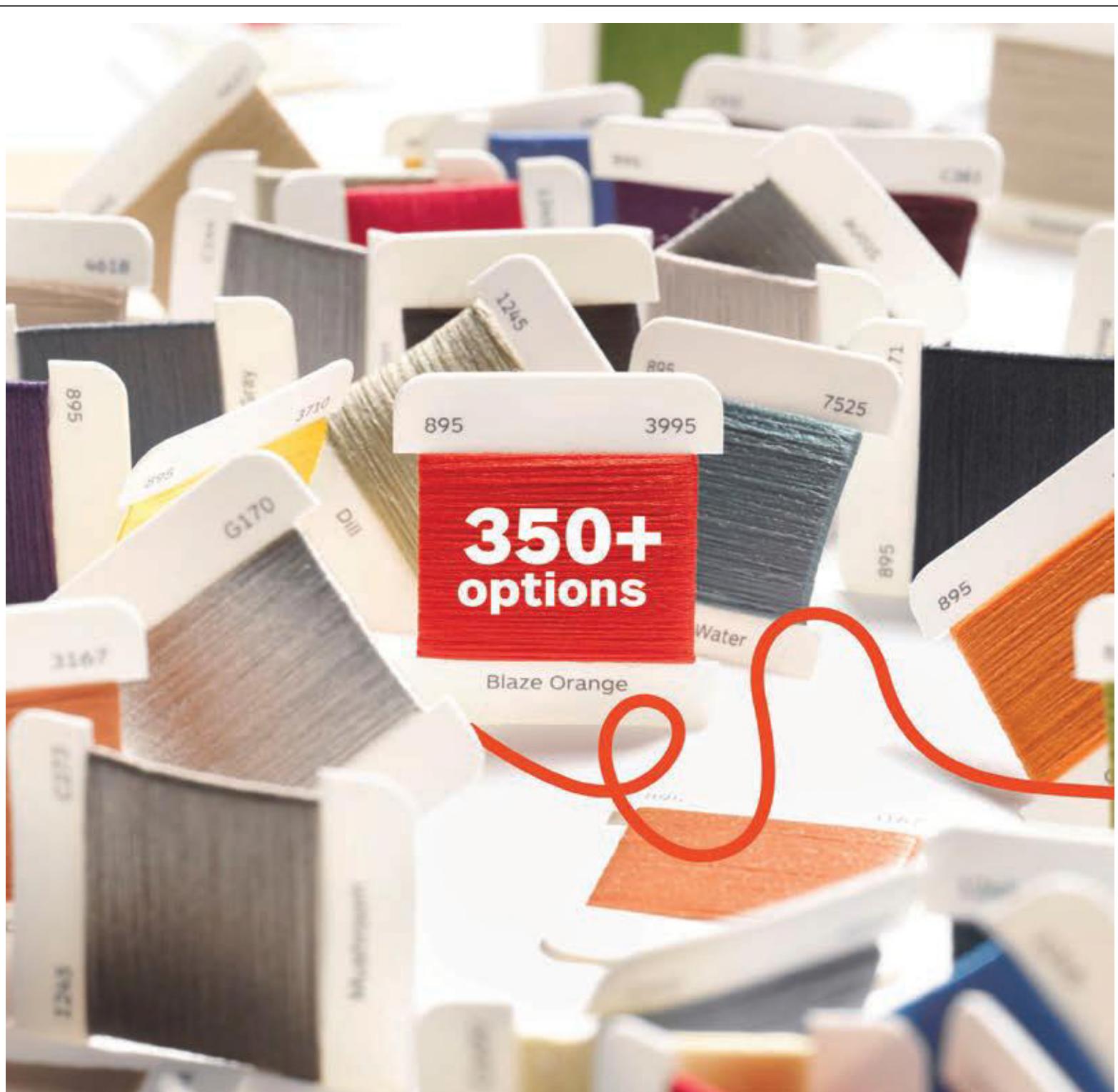
► Stanton

Rosecore (Splendour Smitten)

About the product: This hand-loomed, 100% super-soft nylon product comes in eight colors, including denim, parchment and graphite.

Retailer comment: "This is one of the hottest carpets we have right now. This carpet looks like a Tencel/Viscose piece but is incredibly soft and is made from solution-dyed nylon."

—Joel Schreier, Home Carpet One, Chicago



► Karastan

Modern Tradition

About the product: Modern Tradition has a popular grid pattern that works with every décor in any room of the home.

Retailer comment: "I love the Karastan line...pretty much all of it. There isn't a bad egg in the carton. Every style, every color bank, from SmartStrand to the nylon collections like Modern Tradition...we love this line and have the utmost faith in the product."

—Cathy Buchanan, Independent Carpet One Floor & Home, Westland, Mich.

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DID YOU KNOW



Elkwood from LM Flooring's The Reserve

Dealers stand to benefit by tapping into growing consumer demand for hardwood

Despite the intense competition from alternative hard surfaces, wood flooring still ranks high among the most aspirational flooring products on the market today. Proponents cite hardwood's proven track record as a long-lasting category that contributes to the value of a home, among other desired attributes.

"We encourage the entire wood flooring industry to utilize the preference they have with homeowners and to work together—this way, when consumers ask for wood floors, the supply chain is selling real wood instead of a substitute product," said Michael Martin, president and CEO of NWFA.

In support of NWFA's position and its signature "Real Wood, Real Life" campaign, Martin cited the findings of a consumer survey commissioned by the NWFA and published in *Hardwood Floors* magazine, the official publication of the association. Among the key findings: Fifty-two percent of homeowners said they have wood floors in their homes, compared to 75% who say they have carpeting and 58% who said they have tile. However, when homeowners were asked what kind of flooring

they would have in their "dream home," 66% said wood floors.

The survey also found that not only do homeowners prefer wood floors for their dream home, but 79% overwhelmingly say wood floors do the most to add value to their home. "The life cycle of a wood floor can easily exceed 100 years," Martin explained.

While the survey results bode well for the hardwood flooring segment, experts say the category still needs to be promoted and sold proactively when the consumer enters the store. This is especially important as consumers comparison shop against

other "wood look-alike" products. "Communicating with homeowners who are in the market for flooring should start and end with online advertising—that's where homeowners tend to look first for information," the NWFA research report stated. "The sales points for wood are easy—attractiveness, choice and warmth are the easy ones. Extra attention needs to be paid to the easy-to-clean attribute—homeowners believe it's important but they aren't sure about the best way to go about it. Explaining that could go a long way in making wood flooring an even more attractive option."



TRIED AND TRUE

Red Oak Savanna from Mirage

Savanna from the Admiration collection conjures up landscapes with its rich, ash-brown tones. Introduced in 2010, it appeals to consumers who desire a subdued floor that brings out the natural details of wood decors. Savanna's neutral hue balances a room's more contrasting colors. First available with smooth texture, maple engraved texture and red oak brushed texture joined the Savanna offering in 2019 to meet consumers' needs for a timeless look.

AHF expands LM Flooring lineup

LM Flooring, known for its design-forward, high-quality hardwood floors, has unleashed the largest new product launch in the brand's 20-year history. The expansion entails four new, distinctive collections as well as extensions to four of its most popular lines, totaling an impressive 55 new SKUs launching this fall.

Some standouts: The Reserve offers a 7 1/2-inch fixed width while The Glenn boasts widths of 4, 5 and 6 1/2 inches in the same box. Both collections are 1/2 inch thick in lengths up to 75 inches.

Other new introductions include: Solano, a 9/16-inch-thick, dry-sawn select grade European white oak product featuring a lightly wire-brushed finish; and Waterford, which entails the same format and dimensions, is a North American hard maple floor boasting a subtle wire-brushing techniques.

Line extensions to the LM engineered hardwood portfolio include: Hermitage, a wide plank, 9-inch-wide, dry-sawn European white oak product with planks as long as 86 inches; Bentley Premier, a select grade white oak in a 1/2-inch-thick format with a 2mm sliced face; and Lauderhill, an entry-level product in a 3/8-inch-thick x 6 1/2-inch-wide x 72-inch-long format. LM Flooring makes its own reactive stains for all these collections in-house.

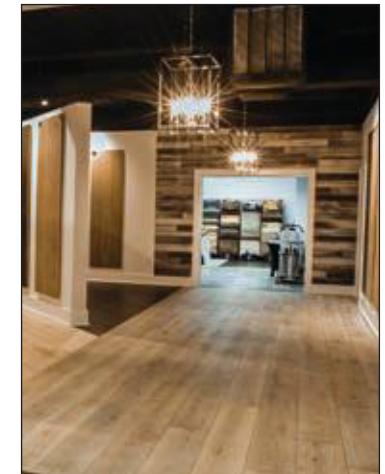
SELLING TIPS

No substitute for the real thing

Given all the options consumers face when contemplating a hard surface flooring purchase, retail sales associates need to be prepared to put hardwood front and center. Following are some effective approaches to promoting wood:

#1: Emphasize the fact that wood, first and foremost, is real. "I ask folks if they have ever seen a 'really good toupee,'" said Craig Dupra, chairman of the National Wood Flooring Association (NWFA) and owner of Rochester, N.Y.-based Installers Warehouse—a specialty hardwood flooring distributor. "They all say 'yes' then I say, 'Great, but you still knew it was a toupee?' Fake wood always reveals itself as fake."

#2: Real wood floors add value to your home—now and in the future. "Some alternative products fade before they wear out," Dupra said, citing some floors that only have a 10 to 12-year life span. "However, we have tons of 100-year-old houses here



that are still getting good use out of their original wood floors. Homeowners will need to replace less-expensive flooring alternatives numerous times before a wood floor will need to be refinished."

#3: Wood is the most environmentally friendly floor material. "The hardwood forests that provide flooring products are growing more than twice as fast as they are being harvested," said Michael Martin, NWFA CEO.

#4: Hardwood provides higher profit margins. "Wood offers higher profits for retailers, bigger paychecks for RSAs and greater satisfaction for consumers," said Chris King, vice president of sales, AHF Products.

#5: Hardwood scores high marks on several areas that are important to consumers. Public Opinion Strategies completed a national online survey for the NWFA. As part of the survey, homeowners were asked about eight different attributes of relevance to them when choosing the right flooring for their home. Three qualities directly associated with wood stood out: durable (67%); visually appealing (61%); and easy to clean (58%). "We tested four statements touting the benefits of wood flooring focused on value, ease of cleaning/hypoallergenic, durability and environmental friendliness," Martin explained. "All four of the statements tested made at least 80% of homeowners more favorable toward wood floors, with three of them making wood at least 50% much more favorable."

NEW AND NOTABLE



Mercier hickory planks

Mercier's hickory floors are designed to turn heads with its wide range of tones and variations, making each board unique. They are offered in a variety of widths, ranging from 2 1/4 to 4 1/4 inches on solid and from 5 to 6 1/2 inches for the engineered products, authentic grade.



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 **MERCIER**
The original prefinished wood flooring

Fashion, innovation lead seasonal debuts

By Megan Salzano

Dealers across the country are still experiencing a boom in business, which kicked off at the end of 2020 and has shown no signs of stopping. Continuing to stem from restrictions on travel and

entertainment, consumers are taking their dollars and spending it on home renovations—most including flooring. The booming housing market has also been a boon to business, and dealers are stocking their shelves with

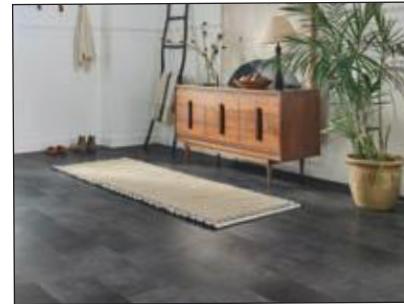
the latest, readily available flooring products.

The fall selling season is ripe with new products from categories like carpet, rigid core and ceramic ready to tackle that demand.

RIGID CORE

Armstrong ESSENTIALS PLUS RIGID CORE

Essentials Plus' 5.5mm SPC core offers superior indent resistance, while its 100% waterproof planks are protected by a 20-mil, commercial-grade wear layer for increased durability and lasting scratch, scuff and stain protection. Available in 60-inch planks with 7- and 9-inch width options, Essentials Plus also features a painted bevel for added realism.



Bruce LIFESEAL CLASSIC PLUS

LifeSeal is an LVT that features a diverse color palette that appeals to all décors, with visuals that represent the authentic character found in natural hardwood. Crafted in a variety of fresh colors in on-trend widths and lengths, LifeSeal Classic Plus features 100% waterproof planks that are easy to maintain and can be installed on any level of the home.



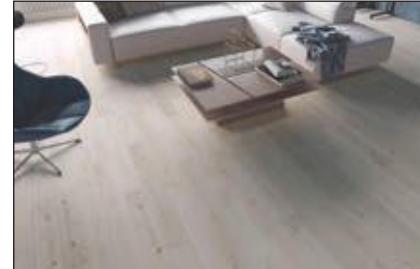
Ava by Novalis AVA STRM

Blending the performance and durability of hard surface with the soft and warm visuals of carpet tile, Ava STRM features two different constructions—5mm loose lay and 2.5mm glue down—in a 9.84 x 39.37 plank format. Ava's patented Amp Advantage coating makes STRM a solid solution for heavy-traffic commercial areas that need durability and ease of maintenance.



Inhaus ELANDURA

Made in Germany using a polypropylene and mineral composite, Elandura's construction is free of formaldehyde, plasticizers and phthalates. Its composition is waterproof, scratch resistant and boasts ultra-low VOC emissions. It is designed to stand up to spills, scratches and pet accidents. Elandura is available in both plank and tile designs. Each plank design has 21 unique planks and 16 for tile.



CARPET

Crescent MAJORCA

Majorca, featuring a hand-tufted texture, is designed for style and performance. Thanks to the hand-spun yarn,

Majorca has a delicate, high-end heathering. Made of 100% UV-stabilized polysilk, it features outdoor performance proper-

ties with an inviting indoor feel. Majorca also features a strong colorline.



The Dixie Group JAG

The Dixie Group's Jag is an all-loop construction using EnVision66 proprietary yarns. A subtle striae of color creates a nimble palette of neutrals and timeless hues. The product references an animal skin yet feels like a usable "overall" pattern. It is conceptually similar to the look in the wool decorative market, the company said. In nylon, the company said it can leverage a long colorline and hit a lot of notes.



Lions Floor FALL SPC COLLECTION

Lions Floor will launch a new collection of SPC colors in the fourth quarter of 2021. Upon listening to the voices of its customers, Lions Floor said it has selected the most in-demand colors and designs to create a new, exclusive collection that aims to be the most adaptive and fitting solution for the immediate market. The collection features 9 x 60 planks with painted bevel edges and registered-embossed surfaces, making each plank look and feel like natural wood. All styles and designs in the collection are Lions Floor's intellectual properties and are registered with copyright both overseas and in the United States.

The line is 100% waterproof with a 20-mil wear layer and an aluminum-oxide UV coating that makes the surface scratch resistance. A thickness of 6.5mm includes a virgin white underlayment and the Uniclic system creates a tight lock and allows for easy, fast and affordable installs for both commercial and residential projects.

SEPT

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Awareness
Month



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St. Jude patient **Calvin**,
soft tissue cancer



LEARN MORE



Continued from page 18

HARDWOOD**Anderson Tuftex
IMMERSION ASH**

With its open, undulating grain structure, Immersion Ash (pictured in Evenfall) is naturally expressive as the outcome of an iterative, experimental process. The celebrated wood species combines time-honored woodworking and transformative finishing techniques to create a lustrous, multi-hued visual, boasting hyper-realistic color variation, authentic matte finish and near-metallic luster. Immersion Ash is available in five colors. Color selections were focused on light with the most vibrant variation. Ash simply looks its best and most aspirational in natural tones, similar to how walnut is at its best in warm rich red tones.

RIGID CORE**Parterre
ASCENDANT**

Ascendant LVT offers a selection of wood grain products in artistic and classic herringbone and chevron patterns. Ideal for hospitality, retail, healthcare and corporate settings, the designs aim to eliminate high installation costs while also providing designers with more creativity and flexibility when it comes to commercial projects. There are nine designs offered in herringbone and chevron cuts for a total of 18 different options.

**Wellmade
HDPC CONCRETE VINYL TILES**

Wellmade unveiled a new collection of acid-stained concrete vinyl tiles featuring variegated colors in contemporary gray and blue tones with mineral and metallic highlights. The new concrete collection joins Wellmade's growing collection of marble, travertine and ceramic tile looks featuring high-definition visuals, grout-look edges and embossed textures for added realism. Soft underfoot and waterproof, the product is available in 12 x 24 tiles with attached IXPE pad for easy click installation. Rigid core construction hides subfloor imperfections, and the durable 20-mil wear layer is suitable for high-traffic or commercial applications.

**LAMINATE****Bruce
NATURAL WORLD**

Natural World TimberTru Flooring, a new collection of affordable laminate floors, features style, functionality and affordability. It offers the realistic looks and texture of real wood floors, plus superior protection against stains, fading, scratches and scuff marks. The collection is waterproof, highly resistant to wear and tear and built to last. It is also manufactured here in the United States.

**MSI
SMITHCLIFFS COLLECTION**

MSI's next-generation laminate features patented, DryLuxe waterproof technology from top to bottom. In addition, this laminate has exceptional scratch resistance and patented, extra-thick core construction for superior resilience.

**Mohawk
PERGO ELEMENTS**

Designed for the greatest adventures and wildest imaginations, Pergo is said to be the brand most trusted by kids—and kids at heart. That's because Pergo has conquered the No. 1 enemy of wood flooring: water. Now with two new laminated wood collections to choose from, there's a Pergo floor for any style and price point.

Pergo Elements waterproof laminated wood flooring features WetProtect, a proprietary locking system and surface coating that provides watertight floors.

Pergo provides worry-free solutions with advanced wood laminating technology that enhances the bold and stylish look of wood with improved scratch protection, fade resistance, dimensional stability and CleanProtect built-in antimicrobial technology.

**LM Flooring
THE RESERVE**

The Reserve offers a proprietary reactive staining technique and a 7 1/2-inch width. It is 1/2-inch-thick with lengths up to 75 inches. LM Flooring makes its own reactive stains for this collection in-house, giving the wood an aged patina, allowing natural color variation and character to come through each plank. It aims to bring all the clear vibrant colors of nature into the home with contemporary weathered colors.

TILE

Daltile
SCRIPTER

HIGH POINT, N.C.—International Market Centers' (IMC) celebrated TrendWatch—part of the Fall 2021 Market scheduled for Oct. 16-20, 2021—will explore new trends that will be reflected in the introductions by High Point Market exhibitors in an immersive experience that is expanded for fall.

"IMC's proprietary TrendWatch is the ultimate exploration of the product themes and innovations that will shape the design industry for the next season," said Dorothy Belshaw, executive vice

president and IMC chief customer and marketing officer. "It's actionable trend education that prepares buyers for market, highlights trends while they are on site and provides a guidebook for sourcing."

Following is a closer look at the trends:

Away. Millions of consumers couped up during the pandemic are taking vacations as restrictions loosen and vaccinations increase. No single destination or landscape reigns;



instead, individuals, couples and families are crafting custom experiences.

Malleable. The so-called red metals—copper, brass and bronze—forge ahead in a mas-

terful presentation of contemporary forms, traditional craftsmanship and authentic finishes.

Verve. Enthusiasm, creativity and spirit abound in a vibrant showcase that unites and inspires through dialed-up pastels, prismatic bights and glowing tech hues.

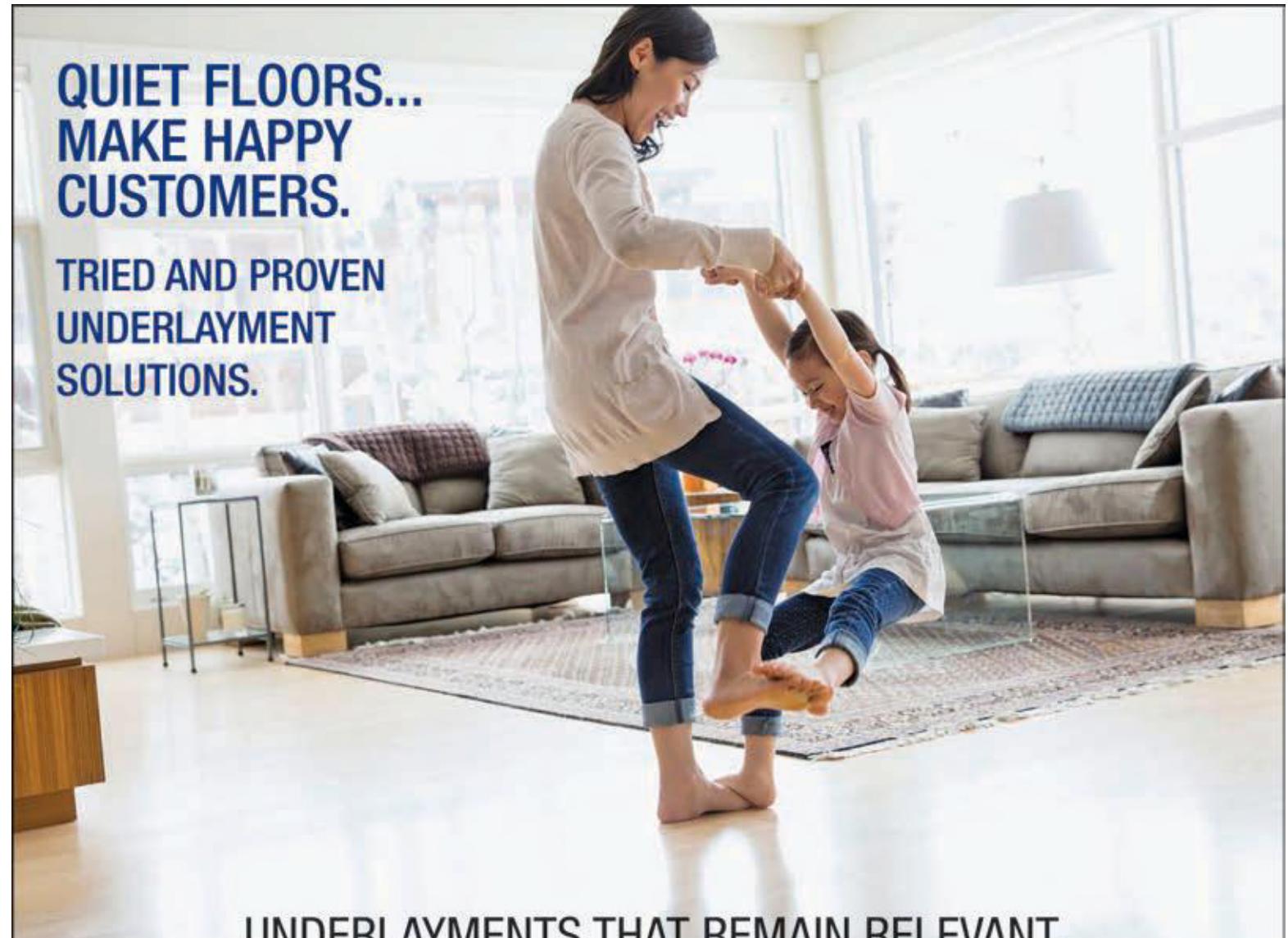
TrendWatch is curated by Julie Smith Vincenti of Chicago-based Nine Muses Media, who has 25 years of experience in magazine editing and home furnishings trends forecasting.

Emser
L'AMOUR

Emser's L'Amour recycled glass tile marks the convergence of versatile shapes with sustainability. Featuring a family of seven classic shapes including picket, diamond, leaf, triad, kaleidoscope, square and rectangle. The collection is available in four sizes for maximum adaptability for any renovation project.

MSI
MARZA

Marza subway tiles boast a striking blend of tones that aim to be a one-of-a-kind addition to any kitchen backsplash, shower surround or accent wall. Colors include Earthy brown tones, blues and greens, creamy whites, gold, bronze, copper and grays, with a glossy finish that provides an extremely delicate or refined quality.

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MPglobal

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PERFECT FOR ALL VINYL PLANKS
EVEN WITH ATTACHED PADDING

QUIETWALK
MULTIPURPOSE UNDERLAYMENT



Merits of utilizing underlays below floors with attached pad

By K.J. Quinn

A common theme for innovation in most industries is “better, faster, cheaper,” and flooring installation is no different. An ongoing debate is how products with a pre-attached padding stack up in the long term against conventional underlays installed separately.

“Unfortunately, there’s not really a specific industry organization that sets standards for the vinyl planks, tiles and accessories,” said Deanna Summers, marketing specialist and account manager at MP Global Products, a flooring underlayment supplier. “Therefore, we perform our own R&D to make products that enhance the installations of vinyl flooring.”

The meteoric growth of hard surface flooring—rigid core and WPC in particular—has been triggered largely by innovations in performance and visuals. In recent years, many vendors have attached underlayment to the boards as a matter of convenience. The thought process being: customers would not have to roll out a separate layer on the subfloor prior to installation if backing was already included on the planks. However, some experts say that one underlayment should not preclude the need for another layer.

“Attached padding could provide moisture mitigation attributes and allow installers to consider bypassing otherwise required steps of subfloor preparation,” noted David Jackson, DriTac Flooring Products’ director of field technical services. “Overall, the installation could be made less expensive and less time consuming with an attached backing option.”

A major selling point of pre-attached padding, proponents say, is it speeds up installation, saving time and money for end users. “Oftentimes, these attached underlays are very lightweight styrene or some variation, which easily attaches and provides a great story to market,” said Chris Palmer, vice president of sales, Leggett & Platt, a flooring underlayment provider. “However, the drawback is the actual underlayment is so lightweight that it might not provide long-lasting support.”

Pros vs. cons

Like any product, there are pluses and minuses associated with pre-attached padding. The

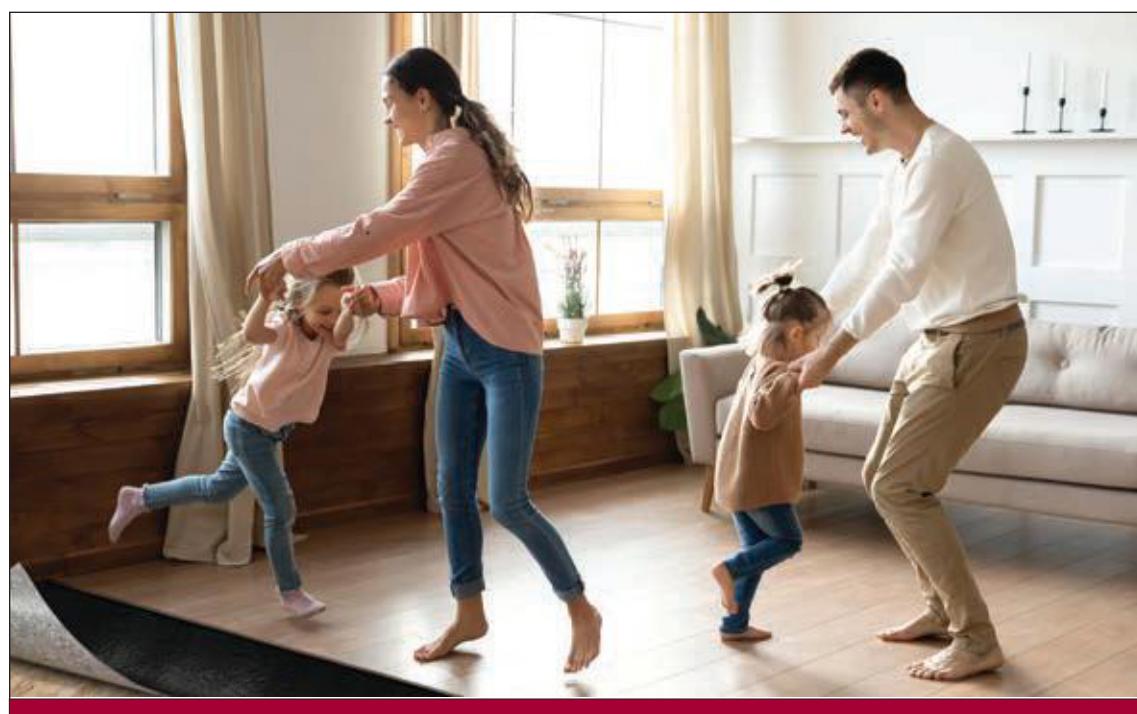
decision to use one or the other (or both) largely depends on the requirements of the customer or the specific demands of the job site. “The choice for the consumer will predominantly hinge on the specific attributes of the product,” DriTac’s Jackson explained. “Moisture and sound control properties will differ from product to product, necessitating the decision to be made on a project-by-project basis.”

Cost and convenience are among the factors for determining whether a moisture barrier

“Having full subfloor coverage of an underlayment will help against vapors being trapped and causing issues like mold growth and alkalinity migration through the cracks of the planks to the flooring surface.”

Indeed, certain qualities of premium-grade underlays surpass the capabilities of attached padding. “When attempting to achieve a particular sound rating, attached padding is unlikely to provide the best solution when compared to a separate layer of underlayment—a situation where a separate underlayment might be the most cost-effective solution.

“While the pad attached to your hard surface flooring might closely resemble a separate foam or rubber underlayment, the engineering of premium-grade, multifunctional underlays have evolved far past attached



MP Global's QuietWalk Luxury Vinyl is a premium recycled fiber underlayment built for luxury vinyl plank, luxury vinyl tile and multi-layer flooring such as WPC, SPC and rigid core vinyl planks.

attached to the underlayment is preferred instead of buying it separately.

One concern with some pre-attached underlays is they can leave insulation gaps between boards. “A consumer may also get the impression that the attached underlayment may prevent moisture migration when, in fact, the cushion is cut to the very same dimensions of the floor, thus negating that benefit,” Leggett & Platt’s Palmer pointed out. “Noise vibration tends to also find seams and is a conduit for channeling noise, which can also be a problem.”

Moisture protection is a major issue, experts say, especially in a world where many hard surface floors are marketed as being waterproof. The general rule of thumb is job sites that experience a moisture problem or have a concrete subfloor require a moisture barrier. “The exposed seams of the pad-attached planks do leave some vulnerabilities to the floor over time when it comes to moisture,” MP Global’s Summers explained.

ment,” DriTac’s Jackson said. “Some hard surface coverings might feel more firm or uncomfortable underfoot with a thin layer of attached padding than with the added cushion of an underlayment.”

All of which begs the question: which option is better? While both attached pad and separate underlayment can be effective, the tie breakers are often costs or which solution provides the desired results.

The upfront cost savings for consumers purchasing floors with pre-attached padding is a major selling point. However, most floors with attached backings feature a locking system that can be damaged if the product is installed over an uneven substrate. “A rough surface such as pebbles in concrete, fastener heads or uneven joints in OSB or wood subfloors may need a thicker, more substantial underlayment to help smooth out those imperfections,” MP Global’s Summers explained.

Some projects mandate increasing the overall height of

pads,” DriTac’s Jackson reported.

A pad for every need

Underlays are made from various materials—such as foam, foam mixed with rubber, felt and cork—and price points and benefits vary. For instance, Ecore’s itsTRU technology enables it to fusion-bond virtually any flooring surface to its vulcanized composition rubber (VCR) backing. “itsTRU technology allows Ecore to combine the inherit performance of VCR with an endless array of surface layers, including VCR, turf, vinyl and carpet,” said Bo Barber, executive vice president of sales and marketing. “Ecore products featuring itsTRU technology have enhanced safety, ergonomic and acoustic attributes.”

Leggett & Platt’s Palmer added, “The constant testing done on Whisper Step continues to find benefits for sound, support and moisture protection.”

Dal-Tile offers a porcelain tile product that offers the best of both worlds. RevoTile features a “backer” attached to the tile and



Leggett & Platt's Whisper Step features high-density rubber that absorbs foot traffic impact noise while extending the life of the floor above.

an innovative click installation system that allows the product to install 50% faster than some traditional tile floors. “RevoTile installs right over many existing floors, avoiding the need for demolition and removal,” Patrick Warren, vice president of residential sales, dealer and showrooms, stated. “There is no mortar drying time, no two-part grout and no return visits.”

A separate, unattached moisture barrier underlayment, called RapidPrep, features a shock-absorbing structure that is designed to maximize the performance of RevoTile’s locking system. “RapidPrep underlayment also improves underfoot comfort, provides compression strength as well as thermal insulation, is compatible with many types of underfloor heating and reduces sound transmission,” Warren said.

Suppliers say dealers can gain a much better understanding of their customers’ projects during the qualification process, which enables them to advise on which underlayment option works best. “We recommend following the manufacturer’s installation and maintenance guidelines to maximize the longevity of your flooring,” Ecore’s Barber explained.

For example, one major consideration for multifamily housing applications is a strict local code or covenant requiring a minimum acoustic score for Impact Insulation Class (IIC) or Sound Transmission Class (STC). “Some required score numbers may be difficult to achieve without adding an additional underlayment to the installation assembly,” MP Global’s Summers noted.

For many consumers, the decision boils down to which underlayment best supports their flooring choice. “The best course is to determine which product offers the greatest level of security in the long term,” DriTac’s Jackson said. “However, as multifunctional underlays continue to evolve, the moisture mitigation, sound abatement and cushion qualities of attached padding could struggle to meet the same standard.”

Opportunities abound at segment's higher end

By Reginald Tucker

With the hardwood flooring category facing so much competition from alternative (and often less-expensive) categories designed to emulate real wood, one might assume the upper-mid range to higher end of the hardwood flooring market might suffer. Turns out that couldn't be further from the truth as suppliers report strong consumer interest in wood floors that retail at the pricier end of the spectrum.

"Hardwood at that upper end continues to be very popular, especially for higher-end homes," said Adam Ward, senior product director, Mohawk. A prime example, he said, is the company's Karastan brand of hardwood flooring, which hit price points in the \$10-\$12 range when it originally launched back in early 2020. "The product is doing well," Ward said. "We've made some nice updates with new products, which started shipping earlier this year."

Other major suppliers are also seeing encouraging activity at the higher end of the hardwood market. At Provenza Floors, which is well known for its reputation for specialty, trade-up products, higher-end collections continue to do well—despite a market that's dominated by price-sensitive "wood-look" resilient and laminate floors. "Customers are looking for wood products that are not your usual run-of-the-mill," said Larry Purcell, Provenza's director of sales, Midwest and Northeast. Specifically, he cited the company's popular Volterra line, a collection of wide-plank, lightly wire-brushed engineered floors. "We're seeing continued interest for that product," he added.

Even the rustic sub-segment of the hardwood sector—a niche market that has ceded some share to the popularity of smoother, cleaner wood visuals—appears to be doing well. Paul Rezuke, vice president of U.S. sales, Wickham, cited the strong appeal of its Mountain Home collection, a character-heavy line that was installed throughout its booth at Surfaces earlier this year. "It's a higher-end product—around \$10-\$11 per square foot—but people love it," he said. "It has so much character; no two boards are the same."

Proponents say the appetite

for higher-end wood flooring products among today's consumer is directly related to people spending more of their disposable income on home improvements vs. travel and entertainment. This coupled with the fact that, historically, wood flooring has long been equated with higher-priced products. "Buyers who are purchasing larger, more premium homes are choosing hardwood floors for their natural beauty, high-end finishes and products that add value to their home," said Neil Wenger, vice presi-

dent of distribution sales at Mullican Hardwood Flooring. "The high end in both new home construction and the remodeling market are very strong for hardwood today."

Drew Hash, vice president of hard surface, Shaw Residential, agreed. "With so many people stuck indoors due to COVID-19 restrictions, many have looked for ways to improve and invest in their homes," he explained. "Hardwood is a highly coveted and sought-after product that adds value and an elevated look

to any space."

Brad Williams, vice president of sales and marketing at Boa-Franc, maker of the Mirage brand, concurred. He pointed to not only the ongoing activity seen in the residential replacement market, but he also alluded to the types of flooring products that are going into upscale residential properties. "We offer the kinds of products that help our retailers succeed and differentiate themselves in the market."

For the full version of this story, visit fcnews.net.



The Belleluxe collection of high-end hardwood from Mohawk's Karastan line targets the upscale consumer.

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lisbiz strategies

What great leaders have in common



LISBETH
CALANDRINO

I'm loving the special edition of *Floor Covering News*, "Drive to 35," which highlighted people and events in the flooring industry. In the issue, FCNews celebrated three and a half decades of people in the industry helping retailers. They honor people who are with us as well as those who are gone.

As I read the articles, I looked at the commonalities of successful people. One thing they have in common is they've paid their dues. They worked hard and put in the time. Have you heard the expression, "It takes years to become an overnight success?" Eddie Cantor, a famous comedic actor from the mid-1900s, was the first person to coin the phrase, "It takes 10/20 years to become an overnight success." Becoming a success takes time, luck (being in the right place at the right time) and hard work. If you're looking for success, here are some tips:

NEVER STOP TRYING. INSTEAD, LEARN FROM YOUR MISTAKES AND MOVE ON.

Do things different—don't do the same things differently. Businesses tend to try to make the status quo better, like increasing their installation warranties. I think this is a mistake. It's better if you add something to your warranties, such as making sure your installation crew wears bright-colored booties with your store name embroidered on them.

Be innovative. If no one else has done it, do it! To become a leader, you must be creative. I've read the new marketing differentiation will be creativity and be innovative. In other words, be good at what you do—not just good, but exceptional. Mediocrity will get you nowhere. Know your craft, your competitors and keep up with the latest innovations.

Know exactly what you're looking to achieve. Author Stephen Covey may have put it best when he said, "Start with the end in mind." What are you going for, what do you want to have happen? It's likely you

don't have the answers, but you have the questions. The right questions will get you to the right path.

Be nimble and don't be afraid to take the path less traveled. There's nothing new in following the old path. You know, the one you know by heart. If it doesn't work, then change the plan and go in a different direction. Not working doesn't mean you've failed; it means you're closer to success. Don't be afraid to fail. Whenever you try something new, failure is always an option. Never stop trying. Instead, learn from your mistakes and move on. In the rare case of product/installation failures that may result in claims, always do the right thing by

your customers. Remember: It's not about making a mistake, which is inevitable if you do something long enough. Rather, it's about how you correct that error moving forward.

Don't think you have to go it alone. You must have faith in yourself but it's likely you don't have all the answers. The late Beatles member John Lennon once said, "We were the best... it was just a matter of time before everybody else caught on. It was more than talent, creativity and 10,000 hours of practice. You must believe you can do it even if it doesn't work out."

Look for a mentor. In my experience, I've found most people are willing to help. Recently I reached out to someone I've worked with, who's not in our industry, for some ideas. He had one great idea that really panned out and he was willing to make a call for me.

At the end of the day, it's all about defining your core values and working to be successful on your own terms.

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.

Republic expands

Continued from page 3

tribution there," Eylor said. "But it's not based on a belief or feeling—we know there is a lot of business in Miami."

There are also other key regions of interest for Republic—areas the company would not disclose just yet. However, Eylor did offer this nugget: "A big part of my day is planning for new locations. For instance, at this moment, we are in escrow to buy 45 distribution centers, and each one is more than 100,000 square feet."

Many moving parts

For Republic Floor, everything ties in together—the expansion of its trucking fleet; the increase in the number of warehouses and distribution centers; the



Republic continues to rapidly expand its footprint across the U.S. via strategically located distribution centers.

arrangements made with vendor partners and shipping companies; and, of course, the rapid growth of its customer base.

"Much of my focus these days is growing the infrastructure of the company, whether it's buildings, distribution centers, buying distributors, trailers, future management—anything that has to do with future

resources," Eylor said. "So when the time comes to move into a certain market, we're already set up for that. So many companies don't have the know-how—they open up new locations without setting up the infrastructure. That has worked well in our favor, especially during the time when the pandemic hit. We were already ahead of the game."

Broadlume

Continued from page 1

points, and we're very good at solving them. But what Jason brings to the table is the ability to find new ways to help them grow their businesses and their operations."

Specifically, FloorForce and Creating Your Space customers will now benefit from a much deeper integration with RLM, Saunders said, which will be its featured CRM product. "If you are both a FloorForce and RLM customer, there will be operational efficiencies. But from a features standpoint, we'll be able to help our customers track everything. We want our customers to understand the ROI of every click on their website, every lead in their CRM and every sale they do."

Broadlume could have built its own CRM platform, but the customers who use RLM love it, and those customers have all seen a quantitative impact on their business using it, Saunders said. "RLM is already the market leader, and as part of the deal we acquire a strategic advisor like Jason. There's no amount of money we could spend to gain something like that."

Aside from looking to significantly grow his own business, Goldberg said he believes furthering the flooring industry is good for everyone. "He's a huge proponent of helping the industry move forward through technology and by helping other independent flooring dealers we can help the industry as a whole, which is good for everyone," Saunders said.

While current FloorForce and Creating Your Space cus-

tomers get the best CRM platform out there, RLM customers benefit from faster product integration and a more robust product roadmap. "However, if you're an RLM user and not a FloorForce or Creating Your Space user, you will miss out on some of the attribution and integration features that we're building, mostly because without access to the website, we can't build an all-in-one technology platform that synchronizes the data," Saunders said. "However, every feature RLM customers are getting now we will maintain and we will continue to provide the level of support they expect."

The RLM acquisition is just the beginning to offering flooring retailers an all-in-one solution, Saunders said. "Our end goal is to have a fully integrated system where a dealer works with one account manager, one team, one company, with a sys-

tem of tools all the way from in-store merchandising to inventory management to website to CRM, all working well together rather than trying to piecemeal it like the flooring retailers are doing today. We want to make the retailers' lives easier with technology, not harder."

When the dust clears, a Broadlume retailer will have a decided advantage over his or her competition, Saunders said. Why? "We want our retailers to be at the forefront. We are constantly evolving and constantly at the forefront of technology. Dealers who aren't using us will be falling behind quickly from a technology stack perspective. A lot of software companies in our industry are complacent and happy with where they're at today. We have 150 employees and a 50-person engineering team passionate about helping retailers succeed."

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marketing mastery

More lessons learned from skydiving

(Third of three parts)

In 2019, I fulfilled a long-time goal to become a skydiver. To date, I have over 330 skydives and am now a wingsuit pilot. This series explores the profound lessons that skydiving teaches about succeeding in your flooring business.

Lesson #1: Make your business and life an adventure

“Same stuff, different day.” We’ve all heard it, maybe even said it. One thing’s for sure: It’s an unhappy way to live your life. I know; I’ve been there. Maybe you’re there right now. It’s easy for our businesses to suck us into a rut where we’re spinning our wheels, working harder and harder but not getting where we want to go. Unfulfilled. Frustrated. Hopeless.

But it’s possible to remodel your business so it funds and facilitates an extraordinary life, an adventurous life. I’ve done it. In part, this series is about inspiring you to do it, too. It’s an invitation to adventure.

By setting up your business



**JIM AUGUSTUS
ARMSTRONG**

over them. I’ve also discovered many of those who are dissatisfied are unwilling to take meaningful action to change things.

Successful owners know that if you want extraordinary results, you must do things that are extraordinary. This means doing what most of your competitors are unwilling to do. No excuses. This often involves marketing differently, selling differently, creating referral relationships with aligned business (realtors, remodelers, etc.) and getting more creative with how you promote and grow your business. It also means putting in the effort to remodel your business so it runs without you needing to be there to babysit it every second. This

way you can work the hours you choose, take time off and reduce your stress. It also makes your business a sellable asset.

Scary? Sure. Difficult? Sometimes. Worth it? Absolutely.

Lesson #3: Fear is a signpost on the way to your goal

During my skydive A-license training—and even now—my coaches constantly pushed me to try new things, to develop new skills. This invariably caused fear. But I recognized that the fear was an indicator that I was growing and developing as a skydiver.

As you consider implementing meaningful changes into your business, you may get an uncomfortable feeling in your gut. That’s fear. And you know what? It’s a great sign! Fear is the signal that you’re on the right track. When you feel fear, recognize that it’s a signpost pointing the way on your journey to an extraordinary life.

WHEN YOU FEEL FEAR, RECOGNIZE THAT IT'S A SIGNPOST POINTING THE WAY ON YOUR JOURNEY TO AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE.

so it gives you lots of money and freedom, you can choose your adventure. This could mean traveling, volunteering, training for a marathon, coaching your kid’s sports team, writing a book or skydiving.

Lesson #2: Do what others are unwilling to do

Skydiving is something most people are unwilling to do, so if you decide to enter the sport you have to be comfortable with being an outlier. This is a powerful business lesson.

I’ve been coaching flooring dealers since 2007; in that time I’ve discovered that, while most of them like the flooring business, many are dissatisfied with the amount of money they make and with the amount of control their businesses have

Jim is the founder and president of Flooring Success Systems, a company that provides floor dealers with marketing services and coaching to help them attract quality customers, close more sales, get higher margins and work the hours they choose. For information, visit FlooringSuccessSystems.com.

Retail outlook

Continued from page 1

during July because they simply could not keep up with demand.

Indeed, some dealers like Casey Dillabaugh, Dillabaugh’s Flooring America, have remarked that “business is so good, it’s bad”—meaning they can’t keep pace with the sheer volume of demand that is out there. It’s no mystery what’s driving this winning streak: housing. Back in the spring and summer of 2020, homeowners who were forced to shelter in place spent money on home improvements—including flooring—instead of entertainment and travel. However, when the economy opened back up and people started spending on entertainment and travel again, flooring business did not dry up as some feared. For that, retailers can thank red-hot home sales for keeping the rally alive.

“The housing boom has had a large [impact] on our new construction sales,” said Josh Elder, president of Gainesville CarpetsPlus ColorTile in Florida. “Meanwhile, our retail sales have also picked up. I think that is largely due to inflated new home prices. Consumers are reinvesting in their existing homes rather than investing in a new home at the increased market prices.”

In Southwest Florida, the real estate market has been very hot, with great demand for flooring products. “We do not do a lot of new construction, but the residential remodels have been through the roof,” said John Taylor, president of Taylor Carpet One Floor & Home, Fort Myers, Fla. “The jobs have been entire houses rather than just one room or smaller-scale jobs. We have seen



Slowdowns at the ports have forced some retailers to find workaround solutions while trying to keep up with demand.

a slowdown in September, but that is typical for us for numerous reasons that include kids going back to school. Once things reopened last May, it seems that everything broke loose and business has been very consistently strong. The new delta variant is real and obviously a concern, but so far I have not seen it affect our overall business.”

For Abbey Carpet & Floor/Floors To Go, Anniston, Ala., 2020 saw record sales. However, through the end of August, revenue was up 9% over 2020. “We anticipate sales will remain good through the year,” said Ted Gregerson, president. “There still seems to be a surge of customers remodeling their homes.”

Houston-based Venetian Blind Carpet One Floor & Home is up about 40% over 2020, with a nice improvement in gross profit margin for the year as well. Venetian has excelled despite having an incredibly difficult time finding sales associates. “We cannot even get a single response to employment listings we have had on various paid search sites,” said Gary Touchton, general sales manager. “We are hearing the same with some of our customers who own various other types of businesses. It’s an

extremely frustrating situation.”

And yet, Venetian is on track for another stellar year.

Adjusting to supply gridlock

Massive global supply chain slowdowns that wreaked havoc with schedules for more than a year have forced flooring retailers to find workaround solutions. At Selinsgrove, Pa.-based Fike Bros. Carpet One, Denise Fike, CFO, said they have developed new procedures to monitor back orders on a daily basis. “We encourage customers to make a second or even third selection if time is an issue. We are trying to be very proactive with our communication to our customers in updating both good and bad news. We are also working with our vendors to find alternatives, if possible.”

Others have ramped up inventory levels to stay ahead of the game. That strategy has worked well for Abbey’s Gregerson, who noted, “We do not promise anything until it has arrived in our warehouse. Making sure customers are aware of possible delays at the point of sale seems to help them be more patient and willing to wait however long it takes.”

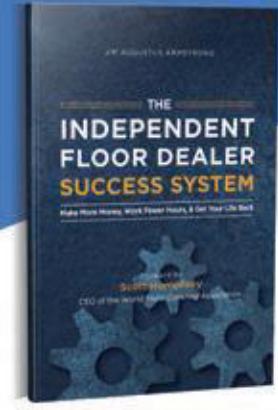
Ben Case, president of Carpet Collection in Lockport, N.Y., said two things have worked in their favor—buying copious amounts of stock and being efficient. “As a result, we have been able to keep our install turnaround time to about six weeks, which, at this point, mostly seems to be well received by our customers.”

Most dealers say their customers are more understanding regarding back orders than they were a few months ago. “We tell them from the beginning the status of their material and tentative installation windows,” said Marjorie Benson, president of Friendly Floors in Port Charlotte, Fla. “I prefer to check availability before anyone signs on the dotted line.”

In Friendly Floors’ case, the supply chain conundrum has not kept the retailer from thriving—as its 2021 sales are up 50% over the year-ago period.

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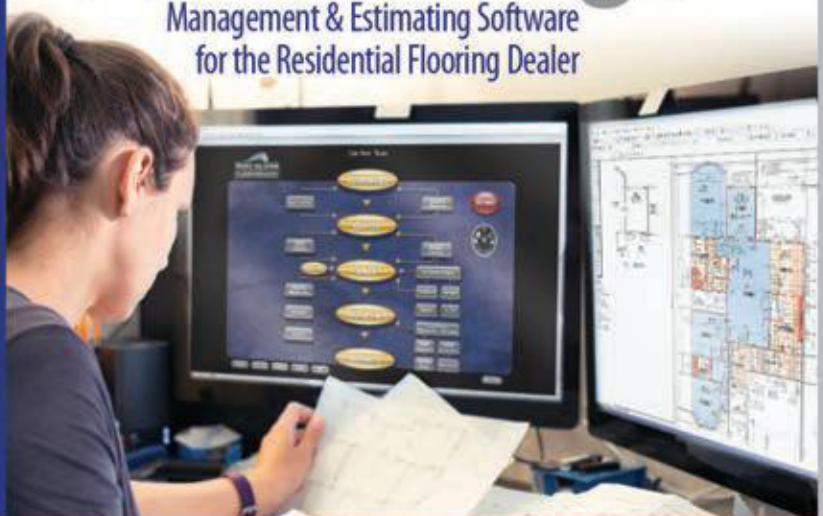
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