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NFA: Still about relationships and rebates

(Reprinted from the National Floorcovering Alliance's 20th anniversary issue, published by FCNews in the spring of 2011.)

The year was 1991, and the floor covering retail landscape was about to forever change. The smaller, independent dealers were aligning and home centers were beginning to sell carpet. Suffice it to say, these new dynamics were not going to play in favor of the high-volume players.

These larger dealers had not found success by accident; they were proactive, forward-thinking businessmen and it was time to act. Enter Charlie Levin, the president of Sandler & Worth, a multi-store chain in the New York metropolitan area with a sales volume surpassing \$10 million. It was Levin who approached Jeff Helman of mid-Atlantic retailer Carpet Fair and Bunny Fain of New England-based Carpet Giant about capitalizing on their purchasing clout.

"The idea was that Carpet One and Abbey were doing pretty well and CarpetMax had just formed, all to address the needs of the smaller retailer," said Levin, who exited the business 20-plus years ago. "Plus, Home Depot had recently gotten into the carpet business. The mid-size to large retailer who previously had advantages due to their size were losing those advantages. So my idea that gave birth to the NFA was a way to give a little leverage back to the larger, regional retailers."

Aside from the challenge coming from groups and the home improvement center model, DuPont was becoming a thorn in the side of the bigger retailers by putting a lot of Stainmaster advertising dollars behind Carpet One. "That changed the focus in the marketplace," said Fritz Munzinger, former owner of Baker Bros. in Phoenix, an original NFA member. "In every market there were bell cows. Now you have these mom-and-pop dealers advertising on the back of Stainmaster. For example, in Phoenix, Tollivers was just a dealer. Now they are spending money like Baker Bros. Where is this coming from? It's coming from support outside its realm. Support is coming to the buying group at the expense of big dealers in the marketplace. So we had to band together to improve our leverage in the marketplace."

The original concept was simple: Form a group of higher-volume flooring retailers that would strike unique deals with manufacturers and share best practices. There would be no geographic overlap and thus, there would be no competition among its members.

"I had already been doing the idea sharing from meeting these dealers during various trips and markets," Levin said. "The casual idea exchange was so valuable that I thought a structured environment, plus what I thought we could bring in negotiations with vendors, would be valuable."

After talking with Fain and Helman, Levin invited a dozen retailers doing at least \$10 million in annual volume to the Atlanta Market in January 1991 at the Peachtree Plaza. A PowerPoint presentation showed how their industry position was eroding, the challenges they were facing and opportunities that could manifest themselves if the dealers could form an organization and act as a larger, stronger whole. The presentation resonated with eight of 12, who joined immediately and met a month later at the first official meeting in Scottsdale, Ariz., where the National Floorcovering Alliance moniker was born.

Levin, who served as president for the first five years, said the early years were not without its challenges. "The interesting challenge was getting a group of very skilled, high-energy entrepreneurs into a room and having them agree on anything. I felt I could be a relatively

effective facilitator and help them see the greater good of compromising some of their desires for the greater good of the group and share information they probably never shared before."

That was the internal challenge. Next up was trying to get the same deals that were being given to other large retail organizations. "The mills hated the idea because they were concerned we had formed to take money out of their pockets," Levin said. "But we were able to show them the benefits of working with the larger retailers to develop and distribute products. In the end, they came to the realization it was more beneficial to work with us."

Carpet Giant's Fain said it was critical for the NFA to stretch regionally across the country. "The idea was to focus on one or two manufacturers in order to provide an assurance of volume across a number of states. At the time we were less concerned about the retail floor and fixturing. The idea was to create a single image. We were less concerned about a single, identifiable brand name. That came along later. We were most concerned about rebates."

The original mills that supported the NFA included JP Stevens, Philadelphia, Aladdin and Beaulieu, and not every member was enamored with the lineup. "We were negotiating certain deals with the vendors on behalf of all the members," Levin said. "If we made a commitment to a manufacturer, we agreed to put our buying power be-

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my take

25 years of retail excellence

The National Floorcovering Alliance (NFA) turned 25 this year. This is as unique a group as the flooring industry boasts. On the surface, it is a collection of 42 of the most successful flooring retailers in North America, each doing a minimum of \$10 million annually, most doing much more. If a member is not the highest-volume retailer in his or her respective market, he or she is among the top two.

But while size does matter with this group—the members' collective \$1 billion in buying power gives them tremendous leverage with their suppliers—their appeal goes much deeper than that. Success does not come by accident with this group. They are among the smartest retailers in the country. They know what it takes to win and often keep their heads above water while the rest of the industry is struggling to stay afloat. Sure, they may be better capitalized than many—but there's

a reason for that. For most, it is inherent. Most of these businesses are in their second or third generation, building on what they've learned from fathers and grandfathers.

But each and every member—past and present—benefit from each other's experience and expertise. When 42 of the best minds come together for a few days, the benefits of sharing best practices, both formally in the meeting and informally at the social functions, are endless. This one will talk about stepping up his advertising when business is down because there are fewer retailers advertising. Another might explain how to make a living on promotional goods. This one will talk about his successful web strategy. Some will discuss innovative marketing initiatives. One may even talk about selling vacuum cleaners or some other way to diversify. The list goes on. I'll say this: Attend an NFA meeting, keep your mouth shut and your ears open and you come away a smarter individual. Works for me every time.

The NFA is also a very tight-knit bunch. Many are friends who will stay at each other's homes or vacation together. It takes

a lot to get into the club. First, a prospective member must generate at least \$10 million in revenue. Second, given the geographical exclusivity of the group (a requisite for the sharing of best practices), there is territorial exclusivity—no overlaps. Third, a prospective member must be recommended, upon which time he or she is thoroughly vetted. Fourth, that member must bring something to the group, something that will make the other 42 dealers better. If someone actually makes it this far, they get to attend a meeting and assimilate with the members to see if it's a fit. At the end of the day, the NFA has to like you and vice versa. No one wants a rotten egg in the club. Finally, the prospective membership is put to a vote. One nay and it's sorry, Charlie.

Yes, these retailers are dominant in scope and smarts. But that's just the beginning. Collectively, these 42 retailers comprise the National Floorcovering Alliance.

Readers of this magazine may be familiar with their store names. Individually, they are an incredible group of people, many of whom I consider good friends. So much so that a few years ago, when I turned 50, I chose to celebrate with the NFA. (I only told a few people). I know what you're thinking: Who wouldn't want to celebrate somewhere sexy at a high-class property. (This one was Grand Cayman.) But truth be told, I'd have celebrated with them if that meeting was being held in Toledo. (Not that there's anything wrong with Toledo.)

This year is extra special for the NFA as it celebrates its silver anniversary. As such, we worked with the group to exclusively publish a special issue commemorating the milestone. Each member has his or her own story, which we tried to highlight within these pages.

Finally, despite these retailers having to run their operations on a daily basis, most were extremely generous with their time as they fielded repeated calls from FCNews for input on the articles that appear in this issue. For that we say thank you and, of course, congratulations on the past 25 years.



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AWESOME HAPPENS WITH OLD FRIENDS

Congratulations to the **NFA** on **25 years** of exceptional industry leadership and friendship.

Here's to many more.



The NFA wields great power, influence

By Ken Ryan

If the National Floorcovering Alliance (NFA) was a single entity it would easily be the largest flooring-specific dealer with sales exceeding \$1 billion and a footprint stretching from Florida to Canada.

Of course, the beauty of the NFA is that it is not a single retailer but a 42-member group representing more than 250 storefronts. It is an association of North America's largest and finest flooring dealers. Fewer than one-tenth of 1% of flooring dealers meet the standard required to be considered for membership in the NFA.

FCNews spoke with the top NFA members, including current and past presidents, and founding members about what makes the NFA special.

Buying power

Dave Snedeker, president of the NFA and division merchandise manager-flooring for Nebraska Furniture Mart, noted that the biggest value of being a member comes from the group sharing successes, best practices and networking with other members. "We have a group willing to share with the other members on most any and every topic. As a member, if you are considering expanding into different categories you have a built-in network to rely on for advice. The other biggest value of membership is the partnerships we have developed



Dave Snedeker
Nebraska Furniture Mart

over the years with our suppliers. We have a mutual trust that lends itself to develop programs that work for the majority of the group. This took years to get to the point it is now, but I believe it to be one of our greatest assets."

Phil Koufidakis, former NFA president and current president of Baker Bros. in Phoenix, said the NFA's buying power both individually and collectively is impressive, "but I think our influence stands even taller and has a longer lasting impact on our individual businesses as well as the vendor decision making process. We represent the best and the brightest the industry has to offer, and it is in every-

one's best interest for us to use that talent to influence industry direction positively where possible."

According to Sam Roberts, owner of Roberts Carpet & Fine Floors in Houston and a former NFA president, buying power is a relative thing. "We deliver tremendous volume from a very small number of dealers. Another important strength of the NFA is our ability to deliver that significant volume in a range of products without limiting the options or otherwise disturbing the ability of the vendor to address the market as a whole. If you'll excuse the gun analogy in justifiably sensitive times, as a tool for a vendor to bring a product to the retail market we are much more akin to a single silenced rifle shot than a shotgun blast."

Roberts said the influence of the NFA is not restricted to the quantity or quality of goods that it purchases. He pointed out the NFA represents a cross section of some of the most sophisticated dealers in North America. "We are regularly reminded that our semi-annual events provide the best forum in our industry for top manufacturer executives to mingle and engage in substantive conversations with their peers throughout the industry and a pretty big percentage of the best floor covering specialty retailers in the country."

Membership has its benefits

Most of the NFA dealers have multiple locations and specialize in retail, which not only makes them similar but also unique in terms of understanding each other's pain points, opportunities and challenges. "To have an amazing group of friends to share those with goes beyond the words you might use to describe it," Koufidakis explained. "Every member of the group is better for being a part. As always the beauty of the group is that each member is independent and runs their business the way it wants. With that said, over the last several years we have moved more toward harnessing our collaborative strength in a positive way for the members and for the vendors."



Phil Koufidakis
Baker Bros.

While the NFA collectively wields great power, it does so wisely. "As the old saying goes: 'With great power comes great responsibility,'" Koufidakis said. "I think we all feel that and we share a common ethical principle to use that power to benefit ourselves first and foremost, but it also must benefit our vendor partner as well. If both ends of that are accomplished, it ultimately has a positive influence on our industry."

For A.J. Boyajian, co-owner of A.J. Rose Carpets & Flooring, with three locations in Massachusetts, the most crucial benefit has been the idea sharing. "Being able to have such a large successful group of fellow retailers to rely on for advertising ideas, problem solving and advice has been a huge benefit to us."

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on the market

All NFA dealers receive the same benefits, but they may value them differently and to varying degrees. Roberts said one of the most important benefits to some are among the least important to others. Specifically, here are some of the major benefits NFA dealers receive as outlined by Roberts:

Rebates. It negotiates above and beyond rebates for the membership from a wide variety of vendors and every penny earned by each dealer is fully distributed to them. The group keeps nothing.

Best practices. Every meeting features best practice presentations from individual members describing, in detail, areas of their businesses that they do best and could bring benefit to other members through the sharing of those details.

Networking. Many of the smartest and best specialty retailers are in the NFA. Outside of formal meetings, a conversation at a meeting, an email or phone call any member can discuss sensitive and confidential information and strategies with other members. "When there is an area of your business that you would like to improve, or an idea you would like to try, you can reach out and glean some valuable information that can help lead to better decisions," Roberts said.

Private-label programs. The NFA has unique programs that have become more valuable in an increasingly competitive environment and with the increased challenges that the Internet has created.

Special program and purchase opportunities. The NFA negotiates special inventory purchases and ongoing running line pricing opportunities for the membership. Of note, every NFA member remains totally independent and is not required to participate in any NFA pro-



Piet Dossche, CEO of USFloors, speaks with NFA dealers during a 2015 meeting in Charleston, S.C.

gram. Attending the meetings and maintaining minimum volume requirements are the only mandates for the individual members.

Social benefit. Most NFA members develop many of their most valued friendships in the industry within the group. While valuable business gets done, the NFA meetings usually feel as much like vacation.

Access to top mill executives. While most of the members are more than large enough to command the attention of the top management of the companies with which they do substantial business, getting to see top management twice a year from such a large representation of the most important manufacturers in the flooring business could not happen for most, if not all, without the NFA meetings.

Twenty-five years of success

The NFA started 25 years ago with eight charter members who wanted to share in funds that were established by the manufacturing community to provide rebates to the newly created buying groups. The concept then, as now, was to work with vendors while working together on key issues of the day. While a lot has changed over the years, the original ideals are still working today.

These NFA dealers were not interested in adopting the business practices of other retailers and didn't want a portion of the rebates they earned to be kept by these groups or their employees or owners. A sliding scale of rebates was negotiated and member-only meetings were held prior to the end of each season to monitor the volume progress with each vendor and collectively work to move the volume to meet a higher rebate level. It was all about rebates.

In the second half of the 1990s, the group started to morph into something else. Membership continued to grow, but the \$10 million minimum volume and unanimous acceptance vote were kept. The popular "vendor day," which precedes Surfaces in Las Vegas, was added to its two meetings.

"Over time, purchasing programs and opportunities were added along with best practices and a functioning NFA board and product committees," said Sam Roberts, owner of Roberts Carpet & Fine Floors in Houston. "The NFA remains a unique, egalitarian group in which no member holds more sway than any other. We maintain strong ethical standards, and courtesy and respect are shown by all to all. Our common mandate is to work to find opportunities that can bring benefit to the membership."

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Core suppliers forge strong ties with

By K.J. Quinn

When the National Floorcovering Alliance (NFA) was founded 25 years ago by a small group of elite retailers, the criteria for entry was quite stringent. The chosen ones were not only heavy hitters in their respective local markets, but they were among the largest and finest retailers in North America.

“NFA members are typically the dominant retailers in their respective markets, and their store names carry tremendously positive brand recognition with their consumers,” noted Bill Storey, Mohawk’s senior regional vice president of residential sales – West.

As membership grew over the years, so did the number of core suppliers with which NFA chose to conduct business. With only 42 members, the collective buying power of NFA volume is large enough that suppliers covet the

opportunity to service their flooring needs. “The NFA is committed to bring the highest value to our members, financially and via idea exchange, and to make a real difference for our suppliers, creating unique synergy and leader-

products and purchasing opportunities are among the principal benefits of membership. “NFA suppliers regard the group, as a whole, with quite a bit of respect, given the make-up and its buying power,” said Michael Longwill,

owner, Airbase Carpet and Tile Mart, New Castle, Del. “Suppliers get aggressive with pricing and product mix to win our business.”

But the strong ties NFA members forged with core vendors go beyond providing access to exclusive products, special pricing and promo-

tions. “Not only are we one of the NFA’s largest suppliers, we have a stellar relationship with their leadership team and all the members,” said Randy Merritt, president, Shaw Industries. “Our relationship is very close and collaborative, which has been a key ingredient in how we work on various initiatives to enhance the benefit for both parties.”



ship to our industry,” said Lisa Browning, executive director. “Our goal is to maximize any opportunity for the NFA that our vendors provide.”

The dynamic between vendors and members is quite different than relationships mainstream dealers enjoy with suppliers. The sharing of best practices, access to exclusive

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NFA membership

Since its inception, Invista has maintained a close-knit relationship with NFA, according to Neill Wilson, SFC channel senior manager. “Pami Bhullar, director of retail development, and Fritz Munzinger, a consultant to Stainmaster carpet, were among the NFA’s founding members and both provided key insights that allowed Invista to create positive value within the alliance,” Wilson said. “Today, Invista has a team dedicated to the NFA that includes a national program leader and eight regional account managers.”

Vendors say they have invested time, money and resources to gain members’ trust and win their business. For example, when USFloors vice president of sales Sam Ruble joined the company about eight years ago, it was doing little, if any, business with NFA members. “So I made it my personal mission to visit every single NFA retailer in six months,” he recalled, adding that over time, USFloors significantly increased the number of territory and regional managers servicing the membership. “We opened up about 75% of them and

“Most recently, many suppliers have presented the NFA with [our] own unique brands and private labeling opportunities.”

—Darren Braunstein, Worldwide Wholesale

sold displays. Fast forward to now, and we’re doing business with 100% of NFA members and we’re in the Elite Retailer group.”

Suppliers have exhibited a keen interest in supporting member operations by participating in their business meetings and providing support services. “As part of our ongoing support of NFA members, Mannington participates in their sales meetings and provides great looking, great performing products, as well as training and education,” noted Jay Kopelson, vice president of corporate accounts. “We work together with them to make sure Mannington is in sync with their needs in each of their markets.”

Ditto for Tuflex Carpets, Shaw Floors’ premier brand. “We enjoy a solid relationship with this group, defined by candid conversation and strategies around marketing, merchandising, products and pricing,” added Doug Jackson, vice president of sales and marketing. “We appreciate the chance to participate in their conventions to get feedback on all of our efforts.”


The partnership is treated as a two-way street, NFA suppliers and members concur, as

both parties often exchange feedback during their meetings. Suppliers listen to concerns on various positions and offer potential solutions, members say. “Many of our core vendor relationships have been developed and matured over decades of personal interactions both business related and socially,” said Ian Newton, general manager, Flooring 101, Ventura, Calif. “There’s not a better venue to get quality, one-

on-one time with our core vendor leaders than the NFA.”

The membership appreciates the opportunity to converse directly with supplier executives to not only pick their brains on a variety of business topics, but to address any issues they may be encountering. “When there are issues and problems, you know who to call first,” said

Continued on page 10



HAPPY 25TH ANNIVERSARY

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Core suppliers continued from page 9

Penny Carnino, director of operations, Grigsby's Carpet, Tile & Rug Gallery, Tulsa, Okla. "That alone is worth a lot."

Helping members gain an edge

Similar to other retail groups, NFA members are provided with private-label merchandise, special pricing and enhanced warranties from aligned vendors, which helps give them a leg up the competition. "Most recently, many suppliers have presented the NFA with our own unique brands and private labeling opportunities," observed Darren Braunstein, executive vice president and COO, Worldwide Wholesale Floor Coverings, Edison, N.J. "All of the above have helped maintain our competitive position while improving margins."

NFA members openly share information amongst themselves to help the group make decisions on stock purchases and merchandising vehicles. "I think the vendors realize this strength at our conventions and even when they call on us individually," Flooring 101's Newton said. "This is how the value proposition comes into play."

Members also enjoy uniquely advantageous agreements from many of the world's leading soft and hard surfaces manufacturers. "We recognize the need for both sides to gain some advantages with the deal and try to always honor what we commit to," said Dave Snedeker, division merchandise manager, Nebraska Furniture Mart (NFM), Omaha, Neb. "Our vendors always do the same. That type of mutual respect is what makes the NFA model so effective and the programs effective for us all."

"[Suppliers] are directing their customers or leads through their website to us, but they are also able to use their brand recognition at the local level."

—Ian Newton, Flooring 101

Shaw, one of NFA's largest suppliers, provides members with access to its full assortment of soft and hard surface products and services. But there's more. "We work with them to help design promotional and on-line support and creative ideas," Merritt said. "We work with them in identifying market trends using group data."

Vendors remain committed to developing unique products which provide opportunities for dealers to distinguish their stores and help grow their businesses. "They do their best to bring us programs that are win-win for us all," NFM's Snedeker said. "They also try to make the offer broad enough to be enticing to the entire group."

Case in point: Airbase's Longwill reports he and several other NFA members attended a recent Shaw Elite convention. "Although it was not an official NFA meeting, we all got together to work with Shaw on some products that we will present to the membership at the next meeting in Aruba that will be winners, if the group pulls together to support it."

In addition to products, special pricing opportunities and rebates, suppliers offer different services aimed at helping NFA members gain a competitive edge. For instance, Invista provides knowledge share, retail consulting, exclusive brands, in-store marketing materials, digital and TV advertising and co-op programs. "Additionally, SFC members receive in-store marketing materials, unique product offerings, a dedicated customer care team and exclusive brands," noted Pami Bhullar, aligned retail development director.

Mannington, one of the original NFA core vendors, works with members on product, marketing, merchandising and other programs to help them sell more and be the best resource for consumers, Kopelson said. "Both Mannington and the NFA members are family-owned businesses, and we have common philosophies about going to market, which has made this a great partnership."

Online lead-generation programming is cited as one of the latest developments which help put NFA dealers on the radar of local flooring shoppers. "[Suppliers] are directing their customers or leads through their website to us, but are also able to use their brand recognition at the local level," Newton pointed out. "So if a consumer is looking for Shaw, Mohawk or Armstrong products in their local area, it's a lead from their brand directed to our Website."

Special promotions

Meanwhile, special promotions and incentives from suppliers are aimed at helping pique consumer interest in specific soft and hard surfaces throughout the year. Carnino reports there have been many special programs which Grigsby's took advantage of, from roll buys to consumer financing opportunities. For example, "Shaw came back with a special financing deal through Synchrony that not everyone in the group has changed over to," she said. "We get special offers on financing during the year, which makes us more attractive to the consumer."

An ongoing key focus for Shaw is creating unique marketing and programs to help NFA business owners grow and differentiate themselves from the competition while providing solutions for consumers. "We also build specific programs to support the retail sales associate, giving RSAs the needed tools to better sell Shaw products," Merritt said.

Mohawk works closely with NFA in developing marketing programs and sales promotions to capitalize on the strength of its brands and ultimately drive business. Special programs and promotions provided by Invista over the years to NFA members include the SFC program, private sales, roll buys, co-op support and exclusive product launches. And



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NFA dealers save the best values for

For NFA dealers, the benefits of membership are well documented: consolidated buying power, exclusive deals, shared best practices, etc. Likewise, suppliers to the NFA enjoy access to some of the finest dealers in the business. But it's important not to overlook the tremendous value NFA retailers de-

By Reginald Tucker

liver to consumers and end users.

"The NFA gives us an extra edge in the marketplace and helps bring extra value to the customer," said Bob Hill, president of Chicago-based FCA Network. "Among other things, the

ability to show new products first and get the jump on competitors by six to 12 months sets us apart from all the other floor covering businesses in our market."

FCA is not alone. For Phil Koufidakis, president and owner of Phoenix-based Baker Bros., the value of NFA membership to the consumer boils down to increased confidence and assurance. "When you're selling high-quality product and you're promoting high-quality installation, the expectation of the customer is very high," he explained. "So we set the bar high for ourselves."

To ensure customers enjoy consistent, top-notch services—especially when it comes to installation—Baker Bros. conducts routine training for its



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staff. Even installation subcontractors the company works with are thoroughly trained. “All the installers we use are Armstrong certified,” Koufidakis explained. “We also have a field technician out there who spot checks all the jobs our installers perform. They are the last line of defense so it’s important to get it right.”

For other NFA dealers such as Nebraska Furniture Mart, a heavy emphasis is also placed on high-caliber services. With so many customers traveling long distances to shop, Nebraska Furniture Mart returns the favor by expanding its delivery zones. “We deliver within a 150-mile radius of each store on a weekly/monthly basis,” said Dave Snedeker, division merchandise manager. He estimates more than 200 communities are served out of each of the company’s four locations: Omaha, Kansas City, Dallas and Des Moines, Iowa.

The fact Nebraska Furniture Mart is a big player in other key home furnishings categories (electronics, appliances, furniture) adds even more value to the consumer as it lends itself to the “one-stop shop” experience. “The fact that

For Hadinger Flooring, a big draw for consumers is the ample selection of area rugs.



we provide professional delivery services is in line with our involvement in other product categories,” Snedeker stated. “We focus on making it a streamlined experience for the customer whether it’s professional installation—which we offer through subcontractors—or providing free measuring. As Mrs. B, the founder of the company who worked until she was 102, used to say: ‘Sell cheap and tell the truth.’”

While many NFA dealers look to woo customers through professional installation services or delivery, others focus on product selection. Such is the case at Hadinger Flooring and Area Gallery, which claims to have the largest selection of area rugs in the market.

“The main value we bring to the customer is the fact we have all flooring-related products

in our store as well as a vast array of those products,” said Ed Keller, CEO. “We have a huge selection of hardwood and tile, and we’re also probably one of the largest retailers of area rugs in the country. Plus, we recently got into the cabinetry business. More importantly, we have the best people in every department and we empower them to take care of our customers. We employ a well-educated sales and service staff that focuses on the customers’ needs to ensure they get the correct product for their application.”



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*Congratulations NFA!
Happy 25th anniversary*

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Father-son combinations provide luster

Research shows that approximately 30% of all family-owned businesses survive into the second generation, but only 12% make it to the third generation.

The National Floorcovering Alliance (NFA) offers many exceptions to this rule as about a dozen second- and third-generation family-run flooring businesses have stood the test of time and made the transition.

Zac Akin, co-owner of Akin Bros. in Oklahoma City, is a second-generation floor-

By Ken Ryan

ing dealer who read those research reports and worried if he would fall in that 70% of entrepreneurs who failed. Instead, he and his brother, Scott, have thrived in taking the baton from father Harold, the founder.

Airbase Carpet Mart is a third-generation flooring retailer. Richard Longwill, whose father started Airbase Carpet Mart and whose son, Michael, now runs the busi-

ness, believes many father-son combinations won't work unless each individual has clearly defined duties. "That was the problem I had with my father," he said. "The one thing we didn't argue about was which road to take to the bank."

The father and son owners and operators of the NFA have learned many valuable lessons—from each other—in how to build and maintain a flooring enterprise in both good times and bad.

Lessons my father taught me

Of the many lessons Jeff Macco, CEO of Macco's Floor Covering Center in Green Bay, Wis., learned from his father James, the most important was to be disciplined and have a short memory when it comes to mistakes. "My dad was a very hard and unforgiving teacher," Jeff said. "Waste and mistakes were not tolerated. I cannot tell you how many times he would walk up to my desk with his hand held out saying I owed him \$3.15 for the door metal I forgot on my job that day,



and then make me pay it out of my pocket. He was much harder on his kids but he was very stern on everyone, and if you messed up you caught his wrath. However, after the butt whipping was over you would never hear of it again—unless you did the same thing... then look out. He could rip you a new one in the morning and the next time you see him that day he was all smiles. This happened all the time. We wanted to make him happy and no one wanted to get chewed out, but again he never carried a grudge. I think I am the same."

Congratulations
National Floorcovering Alliance
 on 25 years

Thank You for supporting The Dixie Group's growth over the years. We look forward to many years of continued success together.



THE DIXIE GROUP

FABRICA *Masterbilt* HOME

Soaring to new heights

Darren Braunstein had some big shoes to fill at Worldwide Wholesale in Edison, N.J., as he was following the path blazed by his father, Alan Braunstein, a legendary figure in the flooring industry. But Darren quickly proved to be up to the task, his dad said. "There is no question in anyone's mind that Darren has made significant changes and improvements to the original Worldwide concept," Alan Braunstein said. "His creative in-store merchandising transitioned Worldwide from a warehouse to a consumer-friendly flooring design center with a warehouse flair. His display concepts, including the industry's first colorwall carpet displays, have been borrowed by both manufacturers and retailers throughout the country. Darren has also developed revolutionary advertising concepts, web design and an installer tracking system he has shared with his fellow NFA members."



Darren, in turn, said he had a great mentor in a father who taught him so many things it's hard to pick which ones to highlight. "But here are a few things: He taught me the true value of partnerships—not just ours (father-son) but with our friends in the industry. I have also learned there are perspectives out there besides mine. Then there is the importance of excellent merchandising, the potential that exists in great promoting and the art of negotiation, where everyone wins."

to NFA legacy

Was it the right decision?

Harold Akin, founder of Akin Bros. in Oklahoma City, was concerned whether his youngest sons, Zac and Scott, had the mettle to carry on the family business. “The first three years I wondered if I had done the right thing by turning the business over to them. But by about the fourth or fifth year—which is now eight years ago—they had gotten it down pat. They had improved everything—from sales to the quality of the stores.”



Zac Akin said it was really about implementing what was already in place. “My brother Scott and I have learned so much from our father, but the one thing that stands out is this: ‘The system works.’ He was tireless in creating systems for how our company functions on a daily basis. There is a system for everything here. I tell people all the time that this company runs itself; just a few tweaks were required from Scott and me to help it run more efficiently.”

For almost a year, Rich Mandel of Sterling Carpet & Flooring in Anaheim, Calif., said he tried to talk his son, Dan, out of the idea of joining the retail business. Dan was already in the flooring business, working for Shaw Industries, but retail is a different animal. “He had come to me and my partner about joining us, but I tried to talk him out of it.”

In retrospect, bringing Dan on board “was the best thing we ever did,” Rich said.

New world order

Like a lot of flooring dealers back in the day, Richard Longwill wore a lot of hats. “I would drive the forklift; if the advertising guy was out I would sit in his office and do the ads. In a small business you could do those things because you had to. When you get to a large size like we are today, you can’t do that.”



Airbase now has 11 locations in Delaware and Pennsylvania. Richard Longwill said a company has to take on the personality of its leader and follow his ideas as to how it should run. In that case, they are in good hands with Michael. “He has a Master’s degree in business from Miami. He is computer driven and works on percentages; he has that kind of common knowledge. He widened the categories of what we sell. We now have many new stores since Michael took over; they are bigger, more complex stores. He has brought in more workmanship and training programs for the personnel; there is more of everything.”

Michael may be computer driven, but one thing he learned from his father is the importance of personal relationships and to see things through the prism of the consumer. “At the end of the day, he was about giving them the best value and to be better, different or cheaper than the competition because you have to be all three.”

Building a community bond

Yates Flooring Center in Lubbock, Texas, and its employees are actively involved in their community, donating thousands of dollars to different charities each year. Joey Yates, part owner and manager of the builder division, recalls that during the Christmas season every year, all the employees would pitch in and buy his dad, Bobby, a nice gift. “He would always get mad and told us to start putting that money toward a charity instead. So for the last seven years we have participated in an event called Santa Cops. We team up with 40 local police officers and 40 underprivileged kids who would not have a Christmas without this program. Each kid gets to ride along with a different police officer where they get to spend money at different stores, followed by bowling and the final stop is at our store where all of the money pitched in by Yates employees goes toward a brand new bicycle for each kid. All of this is because of my dad. He is one of the most humble people I have ever met and I have followed in those footsteps.”



Continued on page 16

CONGRATULATIONS!

NFA

**Leading the Way
for
25 years**

Godfrey Hirst **CARPETS**

NEW ZEALAND WOOL easyliving@home STAINMASTER

Father-son continued from page 15**Taking risks, the old fashioned way**

It isn't always the new-school youngsters who seem willing to take risks. Many of the successful NFA dealers are successful today because the older generation took risks or made bold moves.

The first thing Jeff Macco learned from his father, James, was to keep an open mind on trying new things. "When we started in the '70s my father totally embraced the computer. It's hard to believe we ever existed without computers, but when they were new not everyone thought they would be the essential tools they are today. We were computerized from day one. We even employed a full-time programmer to write our own programs. We networked our system from store to store prior to the Internet and at a time when only two brands of computers could communicate remotely."

James Macco also taught his son to go for the brass ring. "I work best with my butt hanging way out on a limb with two options—succeed or die, with the former being much more desirable than the latter."

During the recessionary years of 2009-12, Richard Longwill advertised to keep the name fresh in consumers' minds. During those down years Airbase also bought real estate, a sound move that positioned the dealer for the down times.

"There were some tough steps we had to take during the recession but my dad was very aggressive and we took advantage of the opportunities," said Michael Longwill. "He always believed that you had to advertise consistently and keep your name out there."

Learning something new every day

For Dan Mandel, Sterling Carpet & Flooring, Anaheim, Calif., the best part of his job is going to work everyday with his dad. "From a business standpoint my dad [Rich] is one of the best retail minds I have ever met. He's very savvy in how to run a business. I am learning something new from him every day—the ins and outs of the business. He has also taught me how important trust is, that you are only as good as your word."

While Rich has a lot left in the tank, he recognizes his son is better suited for the digital revolution. "I'm old school, I still have an AOL account. We have always been a business that is word of mouth. Dan was always willing to try something new, whether it was going on Yelp or Angie's List or Houzz. He is willing to invest the money to grow the business."

James Macco, founder of Macco's Floor Covering Center in Green Bay, Wis., may have been tough on his son, Jeff, but he clearly recognizes the young man's contributions in building one of the industry's most respected flooring businesses. "He has enhanced the business in so many ways, from getting better locations that improve store traffic, by attracting and keeping better employees and using better advertising methods such as a private sale."

Bobby Yates, owner of Yates Flooring in Lubbock, Texas, said his son Joey has the personality where everyone wants to be his friend. "I am more of a bean counter while he is the extroverted one," Bobby explained. "Joey has helped our business from a public relations standpoint by bringing in new customers and ideas. For instance, many of the builders I started with are beginning to retire or slowing down, and their sons are taking over their business just as Joey is here."



Rich and Dan Mandel.

CONGRATULATIONS
ON 25 YEARS OF FLOORING
RETAIL LEADERSHIP



From your friends at Foss, the
nonwoven carpet manufacturing
pioneer and global leader.

Foss
Crafted With Pride in
the USA Since 1952

Core suppliers continued from page 10

Tuftex reports that NFA members participate in its Anso Premier Gallery and SFC programs. "Both of these are known, trusted brands in the marketplace that allow their membership to confidently market Tuftex," Jackson said.

Looking ahead

NFA reports its vision for the future is firmly based on retailers meeting customer expectations. At the same time, members and vendor partners are expected to find ways to drive unnecessary costs from the supply chain, enhance brand profitability, design innovative ways to educate staff and customers, and strengthen their categories against competing industries. "Vendors know that if they bring NFA the right program that will work in most markets, it will be supported and successful," Browning said.

Suppliers consider members an integral part of their success and will continue to support them through product innovation and enhanced services. "We look forward to providing continued support for their products and programs for many years to come," Mannington's Kopelson said. "Our relationship with NFA is strong, and everyone at Mannington values that."

Tuftex' Jackson added: "We enjoy a healthy relationship with the NFA and look forward to another 25 years of the same. As with any relationship, you have to work on it. We feel the support from this group and intend to reciprocate."



NFA RETAILERS HAVE IT ALL WITH MOHAWK

Congratulations NFA on 25 great years!

We appreciate your loyalty, partnership and support of the Mohawk Industries family. Here's to many more successful years!



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competitive edge

There are many competitors covering all areas of the flooring market—builder, Main Street, multifamily. Airbase built its legacy on its retail strength. “Although we do contract and builder—and we quietly do Main Street commercial—we really focus on Mr. and Mrs. Jones—that is our core strength,” Michael Longwill said.



DEFINING MOMENT

During the recessionary years of 2009-12, Airbase got aggressive and positioned itself in the marketplace by purchasing three new locations including a warehouse distribution center, and moving a store from a very bad part of Philadelphia to a better part of town; today Airbase is in key markets with the added advantage of owning its real estate.

PROVEN INITIATIVE

Airbase used to be in the wallpaper business—not just in the business but one of the largest in the industry. When Airbase exited the category 10 years ago it added ceramic tile and hardwood to the mix and later added vinyl. That transition has proven tremendously successful for this venerable dealer.

airbase carpet mart

NEW CASTLE, DEL

Airbase Carpet Mart started in 1967 with the original store located in a hangar-type facility on a U.S. military airbase. Michael Longwill is the third-generation Longwill involved in the business, which was started by his grandfather and then passed onto his father, Richard Longwill. Today, Airbase Carpet Mart operates 12 stores—11 in Delaware and eastern Pennsylvania. The 12th is located in Charleston, S.C.



Unsolved mystery: Airbase ran a promotion for Mohawk’s Sorona carpet in which it used Ricky the Rhino, an oversized inflatable promo piece, outside its store in Lancaster, Pa. One night perpetrators stole Ricky. Airbase created a website (runawayrhino.com) and offered customers discounts on any Sorona or SmartStrand carpet in exchange for information leading to Ricky’s whereabouts. The retailer even offered free carpet for the entire house to anyone who returned Ricky—no questions asked. Ricky was never found.



competitive edge

A.J. Rose is always on the leading edge, whether it is digital marketing, design or customer service. As a family-owned and operated business, A.J. Rose has built a reputation for giving customers the selection of a big store with the service you would expect from a small company.



**PRIVATE SALE
PROMOS DO
THE TRICK**

The company's semiannual one-day Stainmaster private sales are always a big hit. "It is all about creating the one-day sense of urgency by offering the best prices we offer all year during that sale," A.J. Boyajian said.

a.j. rose carpets
BURLINGTON, MASS.

A.J. Rose started as a mom-and-pop floor covering store, selling only carpet, and struggling to grow. Founded in 1977 by Andy and Rose Ann Boyajian in Burlington, Mass., it was a typical American small business striving to make it to the next day. The A.J. Rose management transitioned to sons A.J. and John about 12 years ago. A.J. Rose has grown significantly in the last several years and today services all of Greater Boston with three retail locations in Burlington, Natick and Saugus, Mass. Many changes have taken place in recent years, including a complete renovation of the Burlington and Natick showrooms. The new design of the Natick showroom is viewed as a model for the next generation of floor covering showrooms.



Fenway faithful: The Boyajians—and staff—are die-hard Boston sports fans. It's not out of the realm to hear a retail sales associate belt out a chorus of "Sweet Caroline" [the song heard at Fenway Park during the 7th inning stretch of Red Sox games] after a particularly big sale.



**DEFINING
MOMENT**

This past spring A.J. Rose hosted a launch party at its Saugus store for one of *Design New England* magazine's issues. Those who were published in the issue attended and spoke at the event. A.J. Rose also had several designers and architects as guests.



competitive edge

Akin Bros and its Floor Stores strive to provide a “full-service atmosphere” in its stores and currently install about 80% of sales. Its stores also carry a large selection of flooring products from all suppliers, providing customers with options of style, design and color. From the ground level, Akin Bros believes its employees and subcontractors make the difference by focusing on keeping the customer happy long term.



ZERO % INSTALLATION

The business continues to succeed with its Private Sale promotions. History has shown this sale really motivates the customer and drives them into the marketplace. Usually it is coupled with a free installation offer as well as longer-term, 0% financing.

akin brothers

OKLAHOMA CITY

Harold Akin founded Akin Brothers Flooring in 1971, having learned the flooring business from working in a small Oklahoma City furniture store throughout high school and college. Harold’s first location was called Carpet World but is now known as “The Floor Stores” with four locations in Oklahoma. In 2005, sons Scott and Zac purchased the business from Harold. On the showroom floor on a daily basis, Scott and Zac say they enjoy the customer interaction and take it upon themselves to never lose touch with customers (or sales staff). This interaction is the basis on which the company was founded: customer satisfaction.



A moment in the spotlight:

Harold Akin played football at Oklahoma State before being drafted in the third round by the San Diego Chargers, where he played two seasons (1967 and 1968) before injuries derailed his career.



DEFINING MOMENT

Scott and Zac Akin purchased the company eight years ago. “We had read somewhere that most second-generation businesses fail in the first 10 years,” Zac said.

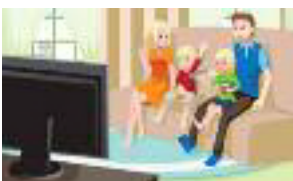
“That was a big milestone for us being a second-generation business. I tell people all the time this company runs itself; just a few tweaks were required from Scott and me to help it run more efficiently.”



DEFINING MOMENT

In 1996, one of Ambassador's biggest competitors went out of business. Ambassador soon took over the business and absorbed those experienced employees. It was a challenge to contend with so much change in a short time; however, it ultimately made Ambassador a larger, more sophisticated company.

competitive edge Ambassador defines itself by the "Ambassador Experience," which focuses on the design showroom aspect of the flooring market. Today, Ambassador has a 15,000-square-foot, new home construction flooring showroom. The company encourages all of its homebuilders to use its selection center and allow their staff to drive the correct flooring decisions for homebuyers. This has made the Ambassador Experience more than just a product- and price-driven commodity flooring item.



CLEVER TV ADS TARGET CONSUMERS

Four years ago, Ambassador began retail television advertising to attract the remodel customer. To maintain its upscale image, the company did not want to do "down-and-dirty" price advertising. As a result, the TV campaign emphasized Kelly Taylor's (Bob's son) efforts to not run gimmicks while his sales manager attempts to sneak them by.

ambassador flooring

ST. LOUIS

Bob Taylor founded Ambassador Flooring in 1985. By that time, he'd been in the flooring business for 30 years. He began working for his father, first as an installer, then a salesman for the carpet mills and as a retail salesman.

In 1985, Taylor saw a need in the market for a flooring company that specialized in flooring installations for new homebuilders. With no office or employees, he began by renting a 5,000- square-foot warehouse in an industrial neighborhood. A large mill soon gave him a big boost by granting him terms and pricing. He bought a used forklift and hired three employees, including his son Gary. His first customer was McBride and Sons Homes, which is still an Ambassador customer today.



Something borrowed: Bob Taylor modeled his company's name after TWA's Ambassador Airline club. After noticing the name in the St. Louis airport, he thought the name sounded classy and decided to use it for his new company.



competitive edge

"The biggest differentiator for us is the quality of our people, the length of time we've been in business and the quality of our installation crews," said Phil Koufidakis, president and owner. "We have always had the well-earned reputation of being a high-service company. We have an incredible retention rate, and we are surrounded by really terrific people. Some of our employees have been with us for more than 20 years."



DEFINING MOMENT

"We were in the epicenter of the economic tsunami that took place back in 2007-08. The Phoenix housing market went from 60,000 to 6,000 and everything was just a disaster; everyone was holding on for dear life. We survived by tightening down and running lean. The good news is during those rough days we only had to lay off three people."



ENTICING INCENTIVES

One of the most memorable promotions Baker Bros. ever conducted entailed a "buy-back" discount on carpet installation. "Not only did I not charge the customers for installation, but I wrote them a check for the labor when the job was finished," Koufidakis recalled.

baker bros.

PHOENIX

Baker Bros., a family-run business, opened its doors in 1945. Early on it established a reputation as a full-service flooring company. The company changed hands several times from the late 1990s to the early 2000s—due in part to the massive wave of industry consolidation. In 2003, Phil Koufidakis came on board to manage the company and in 2005 he bought it outright.

Today Baker Bros. is also known for its wide variety of flooring products. In fact, many of its showrooms—which span about 10,000 square feet, on average—boast inventories of roughly 4,000 rugs. "We carry the most relevant brands in flooring, and we cater to a high-end clientele," Koufidakis said.

Time tested: Baker Bros. was one of hundreds of stores purchased by Shaw when the manufacturer made the move into retail. Over the course of two to three years, Baker Bros. had four different owners. "Thankfully this was all invisible to the consumer," Koufidakis said. "There were some shaky times during those transitions but everyone gutted it out."

*Congratulations
National Floorcovering Alliance
on 25 years of success!*





competitive edge Bob's Carpet & Flooring's business philosophy is simple: provide the best service, the best selection and the best prices available anywhere. As a one-stop flooring retailer, Bob's provides not only a variety of flooring, including carpet, laminates, tile, wood and vinyl, but also offers installation and warranty.

DEFINING MOMENT

In the past couple of years, Bob's Carpet & Flooring needed to rebuild the infrastructure. The company is now less franchise-like and more corporate with a family touch. It also changed the look and feel of its advertising campaign, which provides its customers with a better understanding of what Bob's can offer them.



MARKETING MOMENTS

Bob's Carpet Mart has used TV spots to reach its vast 15-store market with Nancy Alexander serving as Bob's "carpet correspondent" in a series of humorous ads that are used to sell products including Mohawk's SmartStrand Forever Clean carpet. Alexander is a well-known radio and TV personality in Tampa Bay known for her comedic TV spots.

bob's carpet & flooring

TAMPA, FLA.

Bob's Carpet & Flooring operates 15 locations in the Tampa Bay area and has been family owned since 1969. The retailer serves the commercial and residential sectors with the largest selection of flooring options from the most trusted manufacturers in the market.

The first of 12 children, founder Bob Butler was born in Virginia. Although his first job was on a farm, Bob proudly served in the U.S. Air Force before landing in retail. It was while selling carpet door-to-door that Bob discovered his passion for flooring. And in 1969, Bob's Carpet Mart opened its doors in Bradenton, Fla. Bob Butler made sure the company adapted accordingly and as the flooring industry changed, Bob's Carpet Mart evolved into Bob's Carpet and Flooring. Today, Bob's is known for having outstanding service, the largest selection and the lowest prices.



Learning from a legend: Before he joined Bob's Carpet, Harvey Nusbaum, executive vice president of Bob's Carpet, spent more than 21 years at New York Carpet World under the legendary Marv Berlin. His last position at the company was vice president of merchandising options.



DEFINING MOMENT

A major turning point for Carpet Exchange was when it sold eight of its stores. This move represented a big turn toward profitability.

“You can never get all the stores to do well in one month,” Cumbie said. “Sales always fluctuate and you’ll have maybe five stores doing well and maybe four that are mediocre.”

competitive edge

Carpet Exchange has one of the largest selections of carpet in the entire state as well as qualified staff members who each have more than 20 years of experience. In addition to low prices and staff expertise, customers can select rolls today and have them installed tomorrow. Because of Carpet Exchange’s commitment to excellence in terms of price and service, 90% of its customers are repeats or referrals.



NO PROMOS NECESSARY

“We don’t do a lot of promotions,” Cumbie said. “We never get beat on price, service or selection. Our showroom is 40,000 square feet, so we have a lot for consumers to look at. If you can’t find it here, then it’s not made.”

carpet exchange

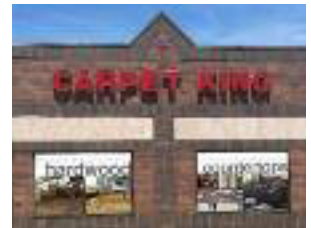
DALLAS

Carpet Exchange is a full-service carpet company and showroom in Dallas specializing in carpet, wood and tile. President Clyde Cumbie’s father started the carpet store in 1990 when Clyde was 6 years old. Cumbie grew up in the industry and bought his father out after the opening of Carpet Exchange’s ninth store.

In 2000, Cumbie sold eight of the stores. He was able to keep the company’s name and retained 40% of his volume from one store. Over the last 10 years, the store’s volume has grown about 60%.



Less is more: Clyde Cumbie said he makes more money with a single, 61,000-square-foot store than he did with nine stores. More importantly, soft surface represents more than 70% of Carpet Exchange’s product mix.



DEFINING MOMENT

A turning point in Carpet King's history occurred when the company began using one warehouse to store its entire inventory.

As a result, the stores transformed into sample showrooms, displaying a majority of the products offered. In addition, using one central warehouse made opening new stores at smaller locations easier, because all the equipment and inventory are not consistently needed in every store.

competitive edge

Carpet King provides a wide variety of products for virtually any customer's floor covering needs in the Minneapolis area. In addition, Carpet King's affiliation with the NFA provides exclusive benefits such as substantially better warranties, private-label products from manufacturers and access to the Lifetime Luxury Flooring collections.



FLAT-RATE LABOR

Carpet King's most effective promotion entailed a sale whereby customers were charged the labor cost as one flat rate whether the services needed were in one room or the entire house. This sale runs multiple times a year and still draws a massive amount of customers.

carpet king MINNEAPOLIS

Carpet King was founded in 1946. When William Bailey, president and owner, took over in 1998, the business was already a member of the NFA and operated from 10 thriving retail locations within the Minneapolis area. After taking ownership, Bailey opened four stores called Flooring Expo, which not only helped to expand the business but also drew more customers with hard surface needs because of the new name.

More recently, the company created a wholesale distribution division called Trade Direct, with two retail locations in northern Minneapolis and north Plymouth. The company has also incorporated Carpet King Shop at Home. There is now a separate retail location dedicated to bringing the flooring business into the comfort of the customer's home.

To the victors... Each February, Carpet King honors the top sellers of the previous year with an annual awards banquet. The entire company comes together for a night of food, drinks and entertainment. This past year, Davis Jeffrey and Steven Brannen performed with a live band that wrote a parody song for each award winner.



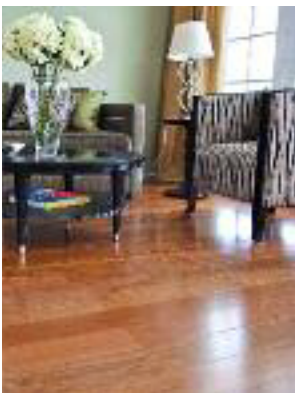


competitive edge Carpets of Dalton boasts one of the largest inventories available in the region, providing customers with a one-stop-shop for all their needs. Along with its large inventory, Carpets of Dalton prices its products aggressively compared to other retail stores in its market. Year-round sales programs ensure a steady stream of traffic regardless of the season.



DEFINING MOMENT

During the mid-1980s, Carpets of Dalton paired up with superstation TBS as part of a major advertising initiative. These advertisements proved invaluable in attracting business when the company shifted from wholesale distribution to a retail store.



HOME WITHIN A STORE

Carpets of Dalton has an actual home inside its store that shoppers can explore to see different set-ups and get design ideas. Throughout the mock-up house, there is a wide variety of furniture, flooring designs and wall colors.

carpets of dalton

DALTON

Carpets of Dalton opened in Dalton in 1971. Soon after, the business moved from wholesale distribution to retail as the industry changed and consolidated. Despite major changes across the industry, the goal for the business was to remain at one location and develop one super store that carried a wide variety of flooring products and supplies.

In 1987, Jerry Hennon took over as general manager while his father maintained active in the business until 2010. As the current owner, Hennon prides himself on his solid and loyal staff. A majority of the store's employees have been with the company for years; not only are they knowledgeable, but they are also helpful when training new employees. New plans already under way at Carpets of Dalton's include a showroom renovation, new equipment as well as a revamped website to create a stronger online presence.



Living the dream: Carpets of Dalton's dream of becoming a superstore has come true. The size of its facility, which carries a massive variety of products, is equivalent to the size of five football fields.



competitive edge

All of Carpet Mill Outlet Stores' locations are Stainmaster Flooring Centers and specialize in serving the mid- to high-end retail business as well as the custom builder, contractor and design community. Carpet Mill Outlet Stores holds customer service at the top of its list and has an A+ BBB accreditation. The company also takes a hands-on ownership approach to customer satisfaction.



DEFINING MOMENT

Carpet Mill Outlet Stores' fortunes changed forever when, in the late 1980s, it made a decision to transition to a larger, multi-store chain as opposed to a single-store model. This was a major hurdle in developing Carpet Mill Outlet Stores into what it has become today.



carpet mill outlet stores

DENVER

The Jensen family has owned and operated Carpet Mill Outlet Flooring Stores since 1974. The company has grown to become metro Denver and Colorado's largest Stainmaster Flooring Center. With 10 locations, plus an area rug superstore, Carpet Mill Outlet Flooring makes it a priority to work efficiently and keep costs low. This way the savings can be passed on to the customers. The company also offers a free shop-at-home service for residents living in Castle Rock up through Ft. Collins.

SPREADING ITS WINGS

Carpet Mill Outlet Store just finished a complete, top-to-bottom renovation, which started in 2014. Some of the major changes included significant expansion of its hard surface offering and a new venture into the granite countertop business.



Downtime: Carpet Mill Outlet Stores is exceedingly proud to be closed on Sundays. The company encourages all of its employees to spend time with their families on what it considers to be the most important day of the week.



HARDWOOD



RESILIENT



LAMINATE



ADURA™ MAX



2016

A YEAR TO CELEBRATE

Congratulations NFA on a quarter century of business. Mannington is proud to partner with you!





competitive edge

Home Plus Floors offers superior customer service. Honesty and integrity are basic to the company's

survival. The retailer is constantly improving and innovating to remain successful and provide maximum savings for customers. "We've been around a long time and people know us," owner Jerry Jones said. "We have the largest selection in our area."



DEFINING MOMENT

Home Plus Floors' defining moment occurred when it sold and installed marble flooring for the Horseshoe Casino lobby in Shreveport, La. The value of the flooring and installation was worth just under \$1 million.



cassity jones

LONGVIEW, TEXAS

Home Plus Floors, headquartered in Longview, Texas, traces its origin back to the 1950s, when Cassity Jones, the father of current owner Jerry Jones, established a lumberyard bearing his name. In 1975, Cassity Jones worked on a flooring project to replace a local church's carpet. From then on, the retailer carved out space in the lumberyards for a floor covering department.

In the 1990s, the floor covering retail business morphed into stand-alone stores under the name Home Plus Floors. The retailer takes pride in combining its talents and resources in fulfilling the home décor needs of its customers. Its mission is to help customers improve their living environment by providing quality home décor products and professional services at great values.

LOW PRICES, GREAT SERVICE

Home Plus Floors reports positive results from aggressively advertising competitive pricing. At the same time, it has consistently generated new business and repeat traffic through private-sale promotions.



Fun fact: "Our birth came from a lumber yard," Jones said. "And the rest is history."



DEFINING MOMENT

Coles Fine Flooring stepped into hard surfaces 25 to 30 years ago, and it has never looked back. The name change from Coles Carpets signaled the turning point. “I realized we had to do more than just sell carpet and we were going to lose customers to people who were offering ceramic and other products,” said Steve Coles, president. “We started with hard surfaces and area rugs, which we did well with.”

competitive edge Coles Fine Flooring is constantly recreating itself and moving with what is going on in the markets. In addition to a complete showroom with a vast selection of carpets, area rugs, hardwood, laminates, vinyl, tile and stone, Coles Fine Flooring’s sales staff is cross-trained in both carpet and hard surfaces. Working directly with its suppliers, flooring manufacturers and carpet mills, the company makes truckload special purchases to save its customers money and offer great values.



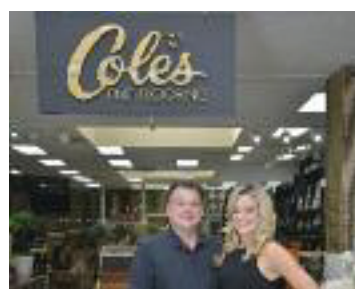
PROVEN PROMOTION

Over two Saturdays in August, Coles Fine Flooring gave away 630 area rugs to local teachers. The well-advertised promotion, which was based on a “first come, first served” model, drew heavy coverage by the local media and generated positive publicity for Coles.

coles fine flooring

SAN DIEGO

Hubert Coles founded Coles Fine Flooring in 1947. Based in San Diego, the company continues to be family owned and operated. The Coles Fine Flooring family has a single mission—provide customers with the best service, superior products and a selection unmatched in the area. The retailer is known for its service, selection and value, and has been recognized with numerous awards.



Living by example: The owners of Coles Fine Flooring make it a point to do good things for the community. “For many years we have been ambassadors for dogs and cats for the Humane Society,” Steve Coles said. “I spend a lot of money every year advertising their support.”



DEFINING MOMENT

In 1981, Contract Furnishings Mart founder Bill Cogdall Sr., frustrated with flooring retailers who offered inconsistent pricing, re-positioned the company as a business that provided fair and consistent pricing to the trade.

competitive edge

CFM maintains 12 large, clean, well-lit showrooms displaying the most current product selections in all categories so customers can see everything under one roof. All CFM salespeople (the staff averages over 15 years of flooring experience) are salaried to create a comfortable buying environment.



CUSTOMER APPRECIATION

As it likes to say, CFM doesn't just work in the communities it serves, it lives there as well. CFM employees donate time, money and resources to numerous local charities and events throughout the year. The business hosts numerous customer appreciation events, among them summer BBQs, Casino Night, and Pints and Products, an installation-themed evening with food and fun.

contract furnishings mart PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Billed as the Northwest's premier flooring store, Contract Furnishings Mart (CFM) is a locally owned and operated wholesale flooring supplier in the Pacific Northwest. CFM was founded in 1981 and has grown to 13 locations in the Portland and Seattle markets. The company carries all flooring products as well as countertops and kitchen cabinets.

CFM was founded by a builder as a solution to the many problems associated in dealing with typical flooring retailers such as inconsistent pricing, inexperienced and commissioned sales staff, limited selection and never knowing what crew would show up to install the job.



Newspaper rankings:

The *Oregonian* newspaper ranked Contract Furnishings Mart among the Top Workplaces in its 2014 rankings of Oregon-based companies. CFM scored highest in terms of employee retention.



competitive edge

Custom Carpet is the better-quality provider of flooring among the local flooring chains, dealing with brand names like Stainmaster, Karastan, HGTV and Armstrong as opposed to the unbranded, commodity goods with generic nylon or polyester. For over 50 years, the company has continued to maintain a strict policy that it will never sell seconds or off-goods.



DEFINING MOMENT

Custom Carpet's defining moment was its ability to successfully transition from the first generation – Jay McDonnell's father, Joseph, who founded the company in 1965 and passed away in 1993 – to the second generation.



PROVEN PROMOTION

In the past year, Custom Carpet has implemented personal iPads for all its salespeople so they can stay in better contact with the customer. Plus, all the company's information is reachable from an internal portal, combining important data with handy access to the outside world. This initiative has helped both internal communication and contact with customers.

custom carpet centers

BUFFALO, N.Y.

Joseph McDonnell founded Custom Carpet Centers in 1965 in Orchard Park, N.Y. McDonnell began with no showroom and carried samples in the back of his station wagon. The garage at his home served as the young company's first warehouse/storage facility.

Starting as a supplier to new homebuilders, the first satellite retail location was opened in 1974 and has since expanded to eight western New York full-service locations. Custom Carpet Centers has grown to over 60 employees and more than 50 installation crews for a total workforce of 100-plus. Today, Custom Carpet Centers has three distinct divisions: retail/residential, commercial/contract and new homebuilder.



Fun fact: The "Callahan Promise" comes from a "name the little man" contest the company held 23 years ago for its mascot. There were more than 2,000 entries, but there was only one "Callahan," which happens to be Jay McDonnell's grandfather's name.



competitive edge DeGraaf Interiors has three easily accessible locations surrounding and servicing all customers in the greater Grand Rapids area. Favorable location, competitive prices and the strength of the NFA buying power have catapulted DGI to new heights. Today, most of the sales people at DGI have a decorating or design degree to help customers with everything from flooring to paint colors.



PROVEN PROMOTION

A few years ago, DGI brought puppies to a local home show as part of a promotion. In addition to a constant crowd, DGI got more in-home measures for the weekend than in its home show history. Seventy-five percent of those home measures were turned into sales. DGI also holds a "remnant giveaway" to all local teachers every fall and spring for use in their classrooms.

degraaf interiors

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

Daryll DeGraaf started DeGraaf Interiors (DGI) in May 1993 after working in the floor covering business for 15 years. DGI initially operated inside another flooring store in Jenison, Mich., as a separate business. In November 1996, both stores moved operations into a new building, and in February 2003, DGI broke ties with the other store and moved to its current location in Grand Rapids. That same month, DGI purchased the assets of Kemp Floor Covering in Grand Rapids and retained all its employees. After Daryll DeGraaf retired in 2007, his children, Deb and Dean, purchased the business.



Change of heart: Deb and Dean DeGraaf initially wanted nothing to do with the floor covering industry. Their father, Daryll, invited both of them to work for the family business doing paperwork and various tasks in the warehouse. Over time, they changed their minds and now love everything about the business.



DEFINING MOMENT

DGI's defining moment came in 2006, following the completion of its largest, most complex commercial project. It was the company's first step into the commercial arena and put DGI on the map.



Congratulations NFA on your
25th anniversary.

Pergamo...

An abstract linear design that creates visual texture and casual appeal to any décor. Constructed of STAINMASTER® Luxerell® nylon fiber and part of the Active Family™ brand.

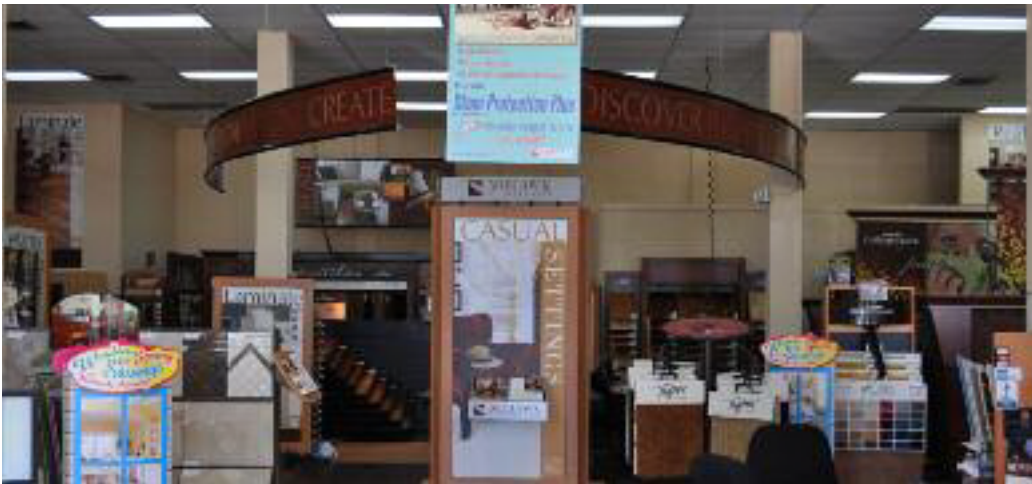
Available in broadloom and area rugs.

Tuftex
Carpet of California

The Premier Carpet of
Shaw
FLOORS

www.tuftexcarpets.com





competitive edge

Dolphin imports laminate, ceramic tile and marble. That gives it a price advantage, and owner Jeff Katz claims to be the only full-service specialty retailer in the area that sells and installs carpet, tile, laminate and wood. "We have GC licenses." The company has also been around for 42 years and does a great deal of advertising, which has given it a brand name.

PROVEN PROMOTION

Dolphin this year started offering 60-month financing. It brings in many more people and attracts a "different element that is more interested in the monthly payment than the total cost."

dolphin carpet & tile

MIAMI/FT. LAUDERDALE

The first job owner Jeff Katz ever had was working as a law clerk. The office needed new flooring, and given that Katz grew up in the business in New England, he told the managing partner he could sell him the flooring. Eighteen months later, Katz quit practicing law, flew to Chicago and told his father that after years of private university and law school he was going to go into flooring full time.

Katz started the business in his garage, calling it Jeff Katz Carpets. He changed the name to Dolphin and opened his first store in south Miami, doing 99% carpet. The success led to the opening of a second store in north Miami; in the 1990s he expanded to Davie. From there Katz felt Dolphin needed to maximize the "advertising umbrella" and expanded to cover all of Dade and Broward counties. Today there are 10 stores.



DEFINING MOMENT

"Around 1993 or 1994 we went to the tile show in Miami Beach. We decided we had to import ourselves if we were going to be competitive. And that led us to importing laminate and at one point wood. Miami is such a competitive market; you have to import goods. That allows us to keep healthy profit margins, which supports our advertising."



If you can't beat 'em... Dolphin Carpet & Tile was originally called Jeff Katz Carpets. Katz actually hated the Dolphins because as a New Englander, every time Patriots came to Miami they got beat. But in 1976, a friend advised him to change the name to Dolphin because the football team had won two of the last three Super Bowls and the business would receive instant name recognition.



DEFINING
MOMENT

Becoming affiliated with the NFA early on was an important decision for FCA. More recently, the decision to become an Armstrong Elite Dealer and Stainmaster SFC were key turning points. But the most challenging turning point for FCA was the housing crash of 2008. Surviving the seven years that followed was a major achievement.

competitive edge

For over a quarter of a century, FCA has been a one-stop shop offering high-quality carpet, hardwood flooring, ceramic tile, laminate, stone, rugs, furniture, decorative accessories and custom window treatments. More importantly, FCA places great emphasis on careful selection of sales associates, long-term employment and extensive training of all staff.

PROVEN
PROMOTION

As a Stainmaster Flooring Center, we have had success with the PetProtect products and “Sit-Stay-and-Save Pet Adoption Days” at FCA stores. Customers as well as the employees like seeing the dogs, cats and other pets that owners bring in for the event. Thanks to the initiative, many customers have been able to adopt a pet, which has created a strong emotional bond and lifelong memory.

fca network

CHICAGO

Bob Hill, founder and chairman of Floor Covering Associates (FCA), has built a group of floor covering businesses from a single store in suburban Chicago in 1976 to an operation that today includes six stores and a design center in Chicagoland.

In 1989, Hill developed his first 40,000-square-foot, large-format store in Naperville, Ill., which was built around the concept of creating a “destination” for all floor covering and home furnishings products. The success of the Naperville concept prompted Hill to close his smaller stores and begin developing only large-format, one-stop stores. By the end of 1999, Hill had established the large-format store as the core of his business.



Did you know: Bob Hill, born and raised in California, is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley. He began his career in floor covering—his first job—as a Mohawk contract salesman in San Francisco. He has served as chairman, vice chairman and CFO of the WFCA, as well as NFA president and vice president. Hill has also received numerous industry and community awards.



competitive edge “We have the best people in the business—the best installers, because I was an installer; the best salespeople, because I am a natural salesperson. We pay 30% to 40% more than any carpet store in the area. This way we can attract the best people.”

PROVEN PROMOTION

Flooring 101’s most successful promotion includes selling carpet by the room. It will do an entire room for \$399 or \$599, which includes pad and installation. The company also offers \$49 installation for the entire house.

flooring 101

VENTURA COUNTY, CALIF.

Owner Jimmy Poulos came to the United States from Greece at the age of 21. While working in a liquor store, a man who frequently came into the store told Poulos he laid floors for a living, earning \$9 an hour. Poulos, the wise man that he is, asked if the man needed any help on weekends. He started helping the man for free, learned how to lay carpet and VCT, and soon got a union job.

After working a year, he was laid off. Undeterred, Poulos founded Flooring 101, working 15-hour days, laying 1,500 square feet a day for 15 cents a foot. Over time, Poulos transformed the operation into a full-service business. He opened his first store in Ventura County in 1972 and 44 years later Flooring 101 does \$25 million in annual sales from five stores.

DEFINING MOMENT

Flooring 101’s defining moment was when it became a Stainmaster Flooring Center. Poulos says the company instantly benefitted from training with Pami Bhullar. Flooring 101 also had the opportunity to sell exclusive products at a higher price and receive more brand recognition.



Dominance: Poulos says Flooring 101 has between a 25% and 30% market share in its trading area—impressive considering there are 60 full-service flooring stores in his market.



competitive edge Floortrends’ staff consists of a very capable and motivated group of people operating under the premise that one person’s success is tied to the success of the group. The company, which operates under a profit-sharing system, remains focused on improving productivity while increasing the quality of service.



PROVEN PROMOTION

One of Floortrends most successful advertising initiatives was an eight-page flyer sent directly to residents living along the Kawartha Lakes area. The promo piece, which included DIY tips, caught the attention of local contractors and brought in a massive influx of new customers. Additionally, Jessica Arscott (Kevin’s daughter), helps promote the business by recording voice-overs for radio commercials.

floortrends
ONTARIO, CANADA

Floortrends launched in 1967 in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada. Kevin Arscott, the current owner, purchased the company—along with a business partner—in 1985 when he was a lender in commercial banking and learned about the company when the previous owners applied for a loan. In 1991, Arscott bought out his partner and became the sole owner.

Right from the start Arscott focused on the targeted demographic residing within the Kawartha Lakes area where many people maintained a second residency. Over time, Arscott added four more stores. But business at Floortrends really started to improve once Arscott joined the NFA in 2012. Among other things, he cites the lessons learned from sharing best practices with other members. For instance, Arscott installed a centralized ordering and warehousing system that allowed Floortrends to supply a larger variety of products.

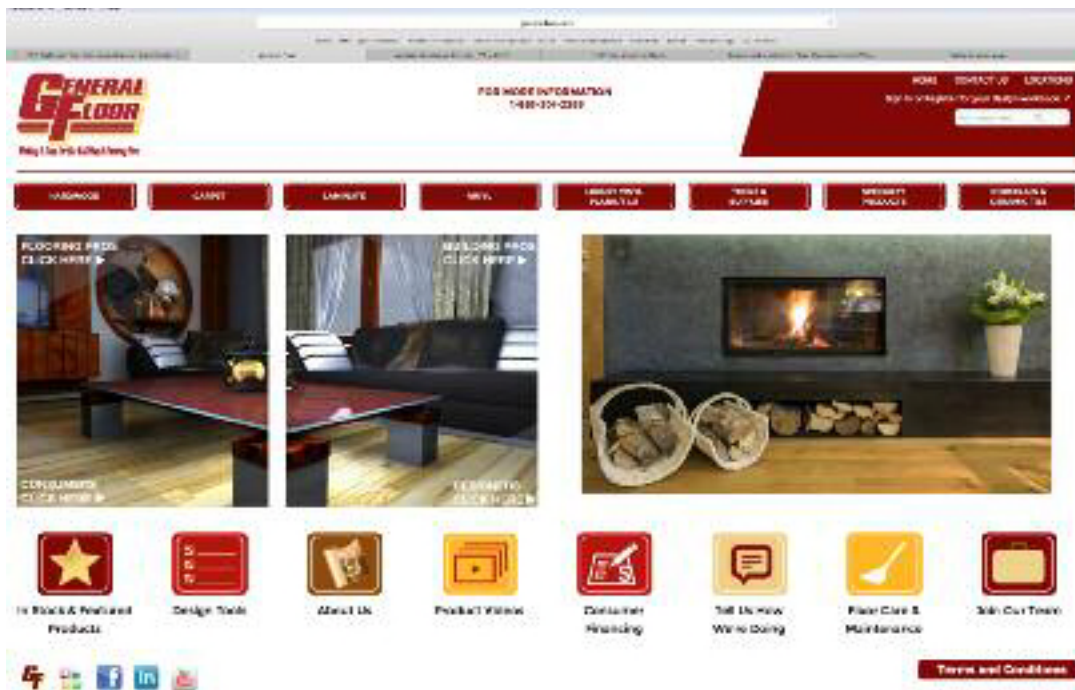


Work hard, play hard: Floortrends periodically hosts social gatherings for employees as a team-building exercise. Excursions have included boat cruises, horse races, hockey games and holiday parties.



DEFINING MOMENT

The owners acquired their second store located in Lindsay, Ontario, in 1998. As part of the acquisition, Kevin Arscott brought on board the entire staff from the previous store, utilizing each employee’s experience and skill set to build the business. This approach served as the model for each subsequent acquisition: a location in Oshawa, Ontario, which later moved to Bowmanville, Ontario; and another branch in Cobourg, Ontario, in 2014.



A DIVERSE CUSTOMER BASE

General Floor Industries services a variety of end-use markets including:

- Carpet mechanics
- Hardwood installers
- Hardwood refinishers
- Sheet vinyl technicians
- Apartment complexes
- Business/office parks
- Assisted living
- Maintenance companies
- Community builders
- Custom builders
- Multi-family home builders
- Insurance restoration
- Fit out specialists
- New commercial
- Interior designers
- Shop at home
- In-home flooring sales
- Carpet cleaners

competitive edge

General Floor Industries' approach to business, substantial inventory, free samples and marketing materials, and various services allow the professionals to focus on their expertise while positioning them to compete effectively, win sales and grow their businesses. The company also focuses on providing a high quality hand sample to its customers for free.

PROVEN PROMOTION

"Long ago, we decided to commit to a 'next day availability' approach," owner Michael Cometz said. "In order to accomplish this, we did three things: have a huge inventory of many flooring products; add a night shift, where we could ready the products for next-day delivery; and obtain a fleet of trucks and drivers whereby we could deliver to every branch, every day, the next day."

general floor


MID-ATLANTIC

The Cometz family founded General Floor Industries, a retail flooring location, in 1967. In 1984 it began selling wholesale to the trade.

Headquartered in Bellmawr, N.J., General Floor Industries operates 18 branches servicing New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware, selling to installers, remodelers and designers. It also operates MP Contract Flooring, providing full service to the new home construction and commercial markets. With the exception of MP Contract Flooring, the company does not sell to the public, nor does it install flooring.



Fun fact: General Floor Industries delivers from its headquarters to its 18 branches every day. At the end of every year, its delivery mileage is enough to go around the world three times.

A photograph of two women in a flooring store. The woman on the left has blonde hair and is wearing a dark blazer over a white collared shirt. The woman on the right has dark hair and is wearing a teal striped short-sleeved top and black pants. They are both smiling and looking at a wooden floor sample that the woman on the right is holding. The background shows shelves with various flooring materials and a modern interior design.

You help cover their floors. We help cover their financing needs.

Every flooring retailer is different, but all share a common ambition: to succeed. And it starts by serving customers better. Synchrony Financial delivers payment solutions that help drive traffic, increase average transaction size, and build repeat business. Whatever you're working forward to, we can help make it happen.

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or 1-855-433-3561.



What are you working forward to?

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competitive edge

Great Lakes maintains a high level of customer service. "Service is not just a word, but a way of life," said Tom Urban, general manager. "Every employee understands this slogan and demonstrates that each and every day to all our customers."



DEFINING MOMENT

Times and location have proven fortuitous for Great Lakes Carpet & Tile, which in 1991 moved to a central Florida location that one year later would be named The Villages, a master-planned, age-restricted retirement community that spreads across two counties. The U.S. Census has consistently ranked The Villages among the fastest-growing U.S. cities.



ALWAYS PROMOTING

A few years ago, Great Lakes started promoting in both the newspaper and on the radio through live radio remotes. These promotions are two-hour events where the radio station does a live show in front of a Great Lakes store. The managers sit and talk about flooring sales, trends, service and any other new flooring types or general questions the consumers might have.

great lakes carpet
CENTRAL FLORIDA

Great Lakes Carpet & Tile is a family-owned and -operated specialty floor covering business operating three locations in central Florida. The company traces its roots to when Joe and Laverne Hearn opened a retail store in a small town in northern Michigan, where they continued serving the local community until 1989, when they retired and moved to the Orlando area. In 1991, Joe and Laverne were offered an opportunity to get back into the business and opened a store in The Villages, Fla. After Joe Hearn passed in 1998, Darren Hearn took over as president.

Today, Great Lakes offers a full line of floor covering products. Its latest addition is a new Rug Gallery by Great Lakes Carpet & Tile that will be a complete, one-stop area rug store.



Did you know... Great Lakes Carpet & Tile's name pays homage to the business' northern Michigan origins, which began in 1964. The retailer moved to Florida to focus on the builder market.



competitive edge

Grigsby's Carpet & Tile has a knowledgeable and experienced staff: 26 employees who have a combined 496 years with the company, an average of 19 years per employee. The company prides itself on customer service and tries extremely hard to satisfy every person who walks in the store.

DEFINING MOMENT

Grigsby's Carpet & Tile's fortunes improved dramatically when it moved into its new location. The move increased sales by about 30%.



PROVEN PROMOTIONS

As with many other Stainmaster Flooring Centers, Grigsby's Carpet & Tile has partnered with its local ASPCA to sponsor pet adoptions in conjunction with Stainmaster Pet Protect carpet sales. "People are wild about their pets and love Stainmaster Pet Protect carpet," said Penny Carnino, director of operations.

grigsby's carpet & tile

TULSA, OKLA.

Harold Grigsby founded Grigsby's Carpet & Tile in 1959. He sold the company in 1986 to Dub Stover. Grigsby's Carpet & Tile was originally located on 15th Street in Tulsa but then moved to E. 41st, where it remained until 2005. In February 2005, the company moved into a completely remodeled building located at 4417 S. Sheridan Rd.

In 1996, the company became a Stainmaster Flooring Center and in 1999, it became a member of the NFA. Dub Stover is now semi-retired; his son David Stover and Penny Carnino take care of the day-to-day operations. Dub also has another son in the business, Jeff, who is currently a salesperson.



Fun fact: Grigsby's Carpet & Tile owner Dub Stover started his floor covering career at Grigsby's in 1971 and then bought the company 15 years later. David Stover, his oldest son, was a racecar driver whose last series were the NASCAR Craftsman Truck races.



competitive edge Hadinger Flooring claims to have one of the largest selections of area rugs in the country. More important, it is said to be the biggest floor store in the state of Florida with more than 30,000 square feet of showroom space and a 21,000-square-foot warehouse. To cover all that real estate, the company employs 78 workers in a single-store operation. “We also are the area’s only Stainmaster Flooring Center and the largest stocking Karastan dealer,” said Ed Keller, CEO.



DEFINING MOMENT

In 1922, Tom Hadinger purchased the property housing the building where Hadinger Flooring & Area Rug Gallery operates today. At that time, recalled CEO Ed Keller, there were no main roads, and it was on the outskirts of town. Today it’s the busiest part of the city. “It’s all about location.”



GIVING BACK

One of the most successful promotions for Hadinger Flooring was a free area rug giveaway for teachers. The promo, an annual event, draws teachers from various locales who line up hours before the store opens. “It’s great publicity, and it gives us a chance to talk to our customers about our great selection and great products,” Keller said.

hadinger flooring

NAPLES, FLA.

When Tom Hadinger opened a retail operation 50 years ago, the primary product was jewelry. It made sense, after all, given his passion for watches, rings, necklaces, etc. Plus, Hadinger’s father owned a furniture and jewelry store, so it was familiar terrain.

But other business opportunities surfaced when Hadinger got into the real estate investment market. “He looked at the flooring business and found a way to buy products direct,” recalls Ed Keller, CEO. “Friends and business acquaintances took notice, and the next thing you know he was in the flooring business. He soon discovered it was a good business.”

(Up until a few years ago Hadinger Flooring still sold jewelry and watches within the flooring department.)



Not just flooring: From the sign on the storefront, you wouldn’t know that Hadinger’s deals in cabinetry. “It’s turned out to be a pretty lucrative business for us,” Keller said.



competitive edge ICC differentiates itself by having its salespeople be the main point of contact from the initial consultation all the way to the finished project. ICC also gives prospective clients the ability to utilize online tools such as a virtual room designer. They can upload the room they are updating and see what it would look like with different paint, flooring and cabinets.



DEFINING
MOMENT

After the housing crash of 2008, ICC locked arms and took the jobs that were available, even if that meant doing work hundreds of miles away. This resilience helped position ICC for success when the market finally turned around.

MARKETING
ONLINE

By precisely choosing where to spend its money digitally, ICC has been able to drastically increase its exposure. Right channels and valuable content have created better exposure and more leads.

icc floors
INDIANAPOLIS

In 1998, Cameron Haughey and Nate Roberts found themselves riding the tail end of a crazy trip known as Indiana University. While in college, the two had dabbled in construction, where they found joy and the promise of a successful future within the industry. With their eyes set on the future, Haughey and Roberts started Indianapolis Custom Carpentry. Today, the company is known as ICC Floors (ICC).

Haughey and Roberts faced many challenges throughout the years but leaned on each other and began to build something special and enduring. Their dedication to fostering quality relationships with their employees, vendors and clients helped accomplish this feat.



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Bosom buddies: Nate Roberts and Cameron Haughey were college roommates at the University of Indiana who started ICC with only \$1,000.



competitive edge

As a full-service retailer, Jimmie Lyles is able to provide personalized customer service. Management credits the company's knowledgeable staff and comprehensive product line for making Jimmie Lyles Flooring Gallery a one-stop destination for customers' residential and commercial flooring needs. "We pride ourselves on providing the best customer service," Anderson said. "That's what keeps them coming back."



DEFINING MOMENT

About 15 years ago, Jimmie Lyles decided to cease advertising. It turned out to be the best decision the company ever made. "We took the money that we would have spent on advertising to put back into growing the business," Anderson said. "We don't focus on low prices, so we don't have to compete with the Home Depot ads. Instead, we concentrate on the mid to high-end of the market."



A GIFT BASKET A DAY

Jimmie Lyles goes beyond the traditional thank-you note when consumers make a purchase. Instead, they are treated to gift baskets containing lotions, perfumes and various other sundries. Sometimes people who are just browsing walk away with a little token of appreciation just for stopping by. "This draws both repeat customers and new walk-ins on a regular basis," Anderson said.

jimmie lyles

JACKSON, MISS.

In 1958, Jimmie Lyles opened its original location on Northview Drive in Jackson, Miss. The company quickly earned a reputation for selling quality goods at reasonable prices while offering outstanding customer service. In 1979, Jimmie Lyles relocated to its current site on Lakeland Drive—a move that allowed the company to vastly expand its product portfolio.

Jimmie Lyles attributes its long track record of prosperity in part to low turnover and high customer service. "The folks working at Jimmie Lyles have been here for many years," said T.J. Anderson, owner, citing several workers who have logged at least 10 years with the company—some much longer.



Made to order: Jimmie Lyles' on-site custom rug workroom offers customers the ability to create special, one-of-a-kind area rugs or staircases. "We employ one of the best custom rug makers in the business," Anderson said.



Congratulations

TO THE NATIONAL FLOORCOVERING ALLIANCE ON 25 YEARS!

The STAINMASTER® brand is excited to celebrate this wonderful anniversary and looks forward to many more successful years together.

Thank you for all that you do!

STAINMASTER
brand®



competitive edge

Levi's 4 Floors prides itself on its integrity, low-pressure sales approach and wide range of offered services. Along with the company's wide selection of products, the company offers exclusive warranties, a customer satisfaction plan and a low-price guarantee. The retailer also has a full-time custom flooring department to help customers design one-of-a-kind looks for their homes.



FINANCING OPTIONS GALORE

To entice consumers to step up to bigger ticket items, Levi's 4 Floors offers customers a store credit card to make projects affordable. With a secure online credit application customers can apply for the card before entering the store. The Levi's 4 Floors card offers low minimum monthly payments and can be used on future purchases.

levi's 4 floors

COLUMBUS, OHIO

Levi's 4 Floors opened for business in December 1986. Since its creation the company has expanded from central Ohio to eight locations throughout the state. Today it services residential, commercial and custom-builder accounts and boasts a staff that has amassed an average of 25 years experience in customer service.

Levi's 4 Floors—one of the largest independently owned specialty flooring stores in the United States—also claims to be the only authorized Stainmaster Flooring Center in Columbus and, as such, carries no seconds or discontinued items.



Fun and games: A few years ago, Levi's 4 Floors provided flooring for the renovation of the Blue Jackets Zone at the Ronald McDonald House in central Ohio. In addition to the flooring, the company also donated a playhouse.



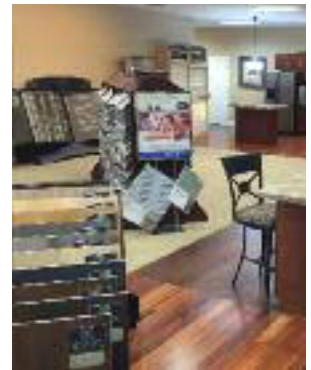
NOT JUST RESIDENTIAL

A dedicated commercial department within Levi's 4 Floors provides free estimates for businesses and offers clients professional recommendations on style, performance and budget. The company also works with a wide range of contractors, architects, designers, property managers, realtors and business owners to help with new installation, replace current flooring and prolong existing floors.



competitive edge

The L&L Company services the new homebuilder market. In the past, it set up flooring programs for the different local builders to address their special needs and help their customers select the flooring part of the process. Once the company expanded and entered the northern Virginia area it started doing a lot of national builder work, which has propelled the company to greater heights, even in times of downturn.



DEFINING MOMENT

Mike Geisler was promoted to president in 2007. Geisler took over the company at the beginning of one of the biggest housing depressions and financial collapses in history. To maintain the company's success, its internal structure had to be re-engineered. It wasn't easy, but with a strong team of individuals, the company has had continued success.



PROVEN PROMOTION

The L&L Company's focus is on service. The company makes special buys so it can provide customers with better products at a reduced price. To uphold its mission statement of being the most respected floor covering company in the universe, The L&L Company services all three of its clients: the builder, the customer and its employees.

the l&l company

MID-ATLANTIC

Gene Lane founded The L&L Company over 50 years ago in Rochester, N.Y. Lane started the business by selling flooring to his roofing customers as a way to generate more sales. As the business grew, he discovered his true passions were in floor covering. He decided to jettison the roofing business and focus full time on floor covering. He started with a small shop and used the local distributors' showroom at night to see customers and sell select products. Over time, Lane opened his own design centers. Today, the company has eight operations locations and 12 design centers in five states.



Time tested: The average tenure of its employees is 14 years. According to Geisler about 12% of the staff has been with the company for more than 30 years. Geisler attributes this to the company's fun atmosphere. From the employees to customers, The L&L Company always generates a smile.



competitive edge

Against the big box stores, Macco's differentiates itself by offering good quality design, installation and service. But when it comes to competing with other specialty flooring retailers, the company chooses to stand out by aligning with limited key vendors as opposed to taking on scores of various brands. "We think it's important to be important to a few vendors than to have every brand out there," Macco said. "This puts us in a position to obtain preferential pricing."



THE ART OF THE SALE

Like many NFA retailers, Macco's reports having success with the Stainmaster Private Sale. "We bought into Pami Bhullar's program into how to run a private sale, taking some notes from our NFA brothers and sisters on how they run their sales," Macco said. "It's a lot of work, but we hit it out of the park when we do it. The Stainmaster brand really resonates."

macco's floor covering

GREEN BAY, WIS.

The origins of Macco's Floor Covering Center date back to the mid-1970s, when James Macco started the business in Green Bay, Wis. The company predominantly served the residential replacement market and was centrally located in the business and entertainment district.

Over time all that changed when Jeff Macco, CEO, and his business partner, Jim Walters, purchased the company from James. Almost immediately the new owners set their sights on relocating the original store and expanding into other territories. The company grew from about \$10 million into a \$40 million operation.

Career



Movin' on up: Every single one of the owners of this company started by working their way up from the ground level. It builds character, Macco believes. "We all worked our way through the company in various roles, from sweeping the floors in the warehouse to cutting carpet."



DEFINING MOMENT

Jeff Macco and Jim Walters decided it would be prudent to buy out Jeff's father, James, because they felt the company needed to go in a vastly different direction to continue growing. "We've grown the company astronomically ever since that time," Macco said. "We did that buy adding a commercial division, which my brother Jim runs, and we moved into better, high-profile locations."



DEFINING MOMENT

In 2015, the World Floor Covering Association recognized McSwain Carpets with the Gold Standard Award, which is bestowed upon a retailer that provides an outstanding experience for its customers. "I have great appreciation to all our associates for their contribution to achieve this esteemed recognition in making our customer experiences award worthy," said Jason McSwain, president.

competitive edge McSwain's sales reps are trained to see every point of contact with the customer as a new opportunity to succeed. "Our salespeople are very dynamic in that regard and can be nimble and adjust to the consumer," McSwain said. "We focus on providing an excellent experience by understanding the customer's needs and meeting or exceeding her expectations."



PROVEN PROMOTION

Like many NFA dealers, McSwain Carpets & Floors cashes in on Stainmaster private sales. But it also markets directly to consumers via social media and other digital platforms and programs. "The digital media side is a big emphasis for us," Jason McSwain said.

mcswain's CINCINNATI

In 1968, Ron McSwain started a wood flooring business created primarily to service the builder community. Since the age of 12, he worked at his older brother Ralph's flooring company. Both learned their skills from their father and grandfather who operated small hardwood flooring businesses from their homes.

In the mid 1960s, Ron formally joined Ralph's business, and in July 18, 1969, the brothers incorporated a brand new division of McSwain Hardwood Floor Co. that would soon become a true family tradition: McSwain Carpets.

As the business started to grow through acquisition, doubling in size every three years, McSwain expanded into carpet and focused more on retail and in 1978 began expanding to other end-use markets, namely commercial and multi-family construction.



Rebuilding the 'Ark': McSwain Carpets was selected to install stranded bamboo in a life-size replica of Noah's Ark in northern Kentucky. The \$90 million project took nine years to complete. McSwain tapped into its 27 hardwood installers who over the course of 90 days installed 128,000 square feet of glue-down strand bamboo.



competitive edge

Nebraska Furniture Mart differs from most of its competitors by virtue of its sheer size. Its primary stores are 450,000-plus square feet and the company stocks the vast majority of its product in store. “We’re a destination location vs. some of the other stores that have multiple locations in the city, Snedeker said. “We can pull in people from 100 miles away for support. In addition, we carry four major categories: appliances, electronics, flooring and furniture. This gives us an upper hand on the competition.”

PRICE CAN'T BE BEAT

Each morning, Nebraska Furniture Mart management competitively shops 38,000 SKUs on the web to make sure it offers the lowest price before the doors open at 10 a.m. In addition, various promotional activities conducted throughout the year draw traffic, i.e., “Stainmaster Days” and its annual stockholder meeting, which is held the first week in May every year. “That event alone brings in thousands of people,” Snedeker reports.

nebraska furniture mart

OMAHA, NEB.

Nebraska Furniture Mart was founded in 1937 by a Russian immigrant, Rose Blumkin, (a.k.a. “Mrs. B.”), who started the company in the basement of her husband’s pawn shop for \$500. The business initially focused on furniture and then expanded to carpet.

In 1984 Berkshire Hathaway, which is owned by Warren Buffett, purchased 80% of the company. Since then it has added a store in Des Moines, opened up a location in Kansas City, followed by a new location in Dallas, which opened a little over a year ago. According to Dave Snedeker, division merchandise manager, the business has continually grown over time. “Aside from one hiccup, there’s been an increase in sales every year. “



Rising from the ashes: This past April a fire broke out in Nebraska Furniture Mart’s carpet warehouse in Omaha. The entire inventory was destroyed and the company had to scramble to take care of customers and put product back in stock. Fortunately, it was able to recover and get back to business within three weeks.



DEFINING MOMENT

When Warren Buffett purchased the majority share of the store about 32 years ago, it set the tone for growth for many years to come. As Dave Snedeker, division merchandise manager, recalls, “He bought it for \$55 million and a handshake. It was that kind of support and backing that allowed the company to grow and mature.”

History continued from page 3

hind it, so getting people to buy in was a big challenge, especially when they may have been doing more business with other suppliers.”

Munzinger put it in perspective. “A dealer would have a mill he was doing a nice job with, then the NFA would select a few mills by the vote of the membership. If you didn’t get your mill in, you didn’t have to throw it out, but you would have to commit to the mills the group selected. So you may have to change the profile of how you were doing business and who you were doing business with. That was one of the early dynamics. But we fought through it.”

Sam Prizant, former owner of Prizant’s Carpet in Pittsburgh and an original member, acknowledged that Levin’s ideas were good, but the group lost some effectiveness in the early years because the members were all strong-minded individuals and independent thinkers. “So even through we supported the NFA, we didn’t give fully of our efforts. It ended up that often there was conflict between the participants.”

The conflict ranged from something as specific as vendor support to as general as the overall direction the group should take. “The idea was to buy together, but with such a diverse group we couldn’t agree on enough products to buy,” Prizant said. “Some of us were similar, but we all had different ideas as to what products we should have. What worked for Bunny Fain in Boston did not necessarily work in Pittsburgh. Some people were higher end and wanted to go that way in their approaches. Then some people thought we should have a very informal organization, while others thought we should be doing more things together as a group. Those people may have been a little weaker financially. But it evolved to a point where we did enough things as a group to make it more effective.”

Prizant said the group became more effective under the auspices of Doug Chadderdon, owner of Carpet Center in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, who took over the presidency in 1995 after Levin. For example, an offspring of the NFA was a computer software company that developed programs specifically for the group.

Another benefit of membership, he said, was to secure more advertising dollars from the vendors. “I still don’t know if we ended up getting more dollars as a group than we would have individually. Remember, you needed to be doing \$10 million in volume to join the NFA. At that volume, most people were getting the advertising dollars.”

Carpet Giant’s Fain said one of the best things about the NFA was the interaction of

the individual personalities where anyone could learn from anyone. “You tend to be very isolated in this business, except when you see a manufacturer at a market. But the idea of having eight or 12 retailers in the same room and discussing business and socializing was of importance to all of us. That may not have been the original objective, but it was one of the primary advantages.”

In fact, Munzinger said when the group looked to add members it brought in people with different marketing strategies. “Nebraska

Furniture Mart was all about getting market share. The same with R.C. Willey. Baker Bros. was all about margin. So, a lot of what was shared was how to grow both at the same time. The one thing we did not share was pricing. We bought independently from the suppliers, negotiating the prices we were entitled to. If we compared notes, it was done outside the NFA.”

So 25 years later, much has changed with the NFA, but the group’s core values of rebates and relationships remain unchanged.



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competitive edge

Perque Flooring is known to give excellent customer service and prides themselves on having minimal to no customer complaints. Meeting customers' needs and fulfilling customers' requests are the staff's top priority.

DEFINING MOMENT

A defining moment for the company was when it expanded beyond one location. At first, Stuart Perque solely hoped to own and successfully operate one store. He was beyond ecstatic as the company expanded to seven locations in such a densely populated area.

PROVEN PROMOTION

After the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina, many people's homes were left in shambles, which sparked a high demand for new floors. Perque Flooring ran a massive advertisement in the local newspapers where their prices for different products and services were listed. Shortly after the ad was published, the Perque Flooring staff was booked for months at a time and customers waited in front of the store with a number in search of service.

perque flooring
NEW ORLEANS

In 1954, current owner Stuart Perque's father and uncle started Perque Flooring in Huoma, La. The business was first known as a carpet cleaning company but then evolved into a small family retail store. In 1975, Stuart's father took over and became the company's sole owner. In 1991, Perque Flooring became the eighth business to join the NFA. Since the founding of Perque Flooring, the company has expanded to include eight locations throughout Louisiana.

In the near future, Perque Flooring will be opening a new store in Prairieville, La. For the opening, Stuart plans to hire a handful of new managers and bring in current exemplary employees to ensure the new location gets off to a strong start.

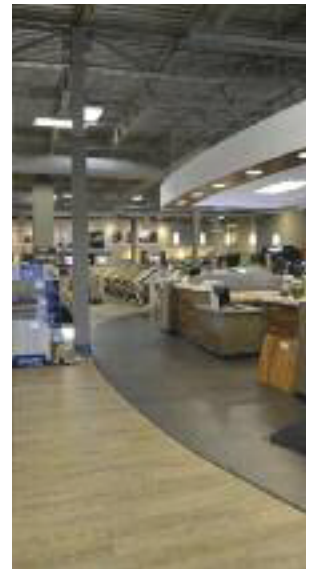


Gone fishin'! Perque Flooring used to plan weekend-long fishing trips for their employees and families. Everyone would rent a boat and then partake in a fish fry for dinner. It was three days filled of bonding and truly getting to know the people they worked with.



competitive edge

The Pierce family has been in business in Montana for over 92 years and claims to have the longest-running warranty in the industry. "We take care of people," said Jon Pierce, general manager. The better a company takes care of people, the more referrals it will have, which is better than any advertisement, he said.



DEFINING MOMENT

Pierce Flooring's defining moment was when George Pierce was contacted about a surplus of "battleship linoleum." His large purchase of the product brought his company into the flooring business.

FASHION FORWARD

Pierce Flooring has committed to a strong social networking presence, engaging with various groups and organizations in its communities. The company hosts "lunch & learns" or "meet & greets" with builders, realtors, developers, architects and other organizations. The company also hosted its first Flooring Fashion & Furnishings event, collaborating with a high-end, ladies' clothing company and four furniture design firms.

pierce flooring
BILLINGS, MONT.

George Pierce settled in Billings, Mont., in 1916 selling used cars. In 1939, George became a Willy's Jeep distributor; about this time, he also started a flooring business with linoleum. Shortly after World War II, carpet was added to the linoleum department.

The Pierce businesses, which include one of the largest RV, manufactured homes, leasing, and parts & service businesses in the region, have grown into a large family-owned operation with annual sales volume in excess of \$70 million. Pierce Flooring is recognized as being one of the top 30 retailers in the United States. Its companies, which employ over 230 people, are based on hard work, honesty, trust; taking extreme care of the customers, suppliers and employees; and giving back to Montana's communities.



Oil rich: Pierce Flooring had a customer who had made his fortune in the North Dakota oil fields and decided to build a lavish home in Bozeman. The home featured hardwood on the ceilings and full marble slabs on the floors. Pierce Flooring's portion of the home was well over \$1 million.



DEFINING MOMENT

Four years ago, Raby Companies entered the kitchen and bath remodeling business. It now sells cabinets, granite countertops and slabs, and it also owns a fabrication company. The business has been a profit center and now accounts for 15% of the business. "We got into kitchen remodeling because people are staying in their homes, and they are remodeling more," said Phillip Raby."

competitive edge

In a region where Home Depot and Lowe's looms large, Raby has won by offering consistently good customer service. But that alone can't always been the differentiator. Thus, Raby has focused increasingly on private-label goods. "Your competition is your supplier, the Internet and your other dealers in the marketplace," Phillip Raby said. "By private labeling you can't be shopped, and you get a better chance of getting a job."

SALES DRIVE REPEAT BUSINESS

Twice a year private sales have been a boon for Raby, which draws on its decades of experience in northern New Mexico to attract repeat business. These promotions have served well amid Albuquerque's sputtering economy.

the raby companies

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.

Founded in 1950 by Ralph Norman Raby, Raby Companies Inc. began as a single store selling appliances and furniture to the Albuquerque community. The organization bloomed into a multi-location flooring specialty outlet that includes kitchen and bath remodeling services.

Phillip Raby Sr. and Ralph-David Raby currently own the business. Phillip joined his father in 1956 and has been with the organization ever since. The business entities under the Raby Companies umbrella are Raby Carpet and Tile Outlet, Flooring Direct Wholesale, Raby Contract, Floor Mart, Home Solutions, and Sunwest Granite and Stone.



One brand fits all: For decades, Raby Companies operated under several monikers. But four months ago, in an effort to bring consistency to the brand, lower advertising costs and streamline the brand message, Raby is now operating under one name—Raby Home Solutions.



competitive edge R.C. Willey’s forte is its reputation for wide selection, competitive pricing, great service and personnel.

According to Steve Hendricks, carpet buyer, the company stocks everything from the low to high end and strives to give its customers the best overall value. “We are full-service, from the moment you walk in the door to years down the road,” he said. “We have the best sales and support associates in the business. If you have an issue, we are there to help.”



DEFINING MOMENT

Selling the company to Berkshire Hathaway in 1995 was a key turning point for R.C. Willey, according to Hendricks. Another milestone: opening its first store outside of Utah in 1999.



KEEP IT SIMPLE

R.C. Willey uses billboards with a simple message: The price of three rooms of carpet or one room of hardwood. “It needs to be easy to understand [while driving] at 75 mph,” Hendricks said.

r.c. willey

CALIFORNIA, IDAHO, NEVADA, UTAH

R.C. Willey Home Furnishings is a total home furnishings company specializing in flooring, furniture, electronics, home appliances and mattresses. It was founded by Rufus Call Willey in 1932, when he started selling Hotpoint Brand appliances door-to-door in Syracuse, Utah. Today it operates 11 stores in Idaho, Nevada, California and Utah. R.C. Willey is currently owned by Berkshire Hathaway.



Free franks: In a given year, R.C. Willey gives away more than 600,000 free hot dogs at its 11 stores in Utah, Idaho, Nevada and California.



DEFINING MOMENT

In 1990, Sam Roberts bought his first building and moved an existing store that was in a leased space into it. In 1997, he built his first multi-tenant strip center and put a Roberts Carpet & Fine Floors in one of the buildings. By the end of 1999, Roberts was no longer leasing space for any of his stores.

competitive edge

Roberts Carpet stands apart from the pack in a number of ways, but most obviously through its emphasis on better goods. For example, it is the only Masland Signature M, Karastan Platinum, Stainmaster Flooring Center and Armstrong Elite dealer in the Houston metropolitan area.

roberts carpet

HOUSTON

Sam and Valerie Roberts founded Roberts Carpet & Fine Floors in 1984. Within their first five years, Roberts Carpet opened five leased stores, all in the Houston metropolitan area. The original owners currently still run the company.

Initially, Roberts Carpet differentiated itself by emphasizing the sale of ceramic tile and hardwood products in addition to carpet and vinyl. While that is standard practice today, it was relatively rare when the company was created. Since its inception, Roberts Carpet has been more than 50% hard surface.



TARGET MARKETING

Seven years ago, Roberts Carpet opened a division to primarily address what Sam Roberts calls "urban development" business. This is mostly high-end, luxury high-rise condominium and custom builder work. It took some time to develop, but it is now doing very well.



Leap of faith: Sam Roberts opened his first store with a total of nine months experience in the carpet and flooring industry. He had no partners and the only other employee was a part-time college kid who knew nothing about the business.



competitive edge

Jim Mudd said while Sam Kinnaird's Flooring is not perfect, it vows to resolve any issue swiftly and to the customer's satisfaction.

"We have been here for 49 years. Our customers know we are going to be here tomorrow so we have to make things right today, no matter what it costs us."

DEFINING MOMENT

The key point in Sam Kinnaird's Flooring's history was when it started promoting Stainmaster private sales. This promotion marked a new direction in the company's marketing philosophy.



PROVEN PROMOTION

Sam Kinnaird's Flooring believes in private sales and has promoted private sales with Stainmaster for 15 years. Five years ago, it started a hard-surface private sale with Armstrong, which has been equally successful.

sam kinnaird's

LOUISVILLE, KY.

Sam Kinnaird founded Kinnaird & Francke in 1967 and grew the business into one of the largest retailers in the country, with 14 stores in three states. In 1983, Kinnaird and Francke was sold and Sam Kinnaird briefly retired. In 1989, Sam Kinnaird, along with current president Jim Mudd, started Sam Kinnaird's Flooring in Louisville, Ky. The retailer currently has two locations in the Louisville area and carries a large selection of flooring products including carpet, hardwood, laminate, LVT/LVP, area rugs, ceramic/porcelain tile, nature stone and vinyl.

Sam Kinnaird passed away earlier this year at the age of 84.



Off to the races: Sam Kinnaird's supplies supply Churchill Downs racetrack with the red carpet for the celebrities to walk on when they come to the Kentucky Derby.



competitive edge The owners of Sarmazian Brothers take a hands-on approach to running the business. Moreover, they take tremendous pride in the efforts of their employees who work hard at maintaining the company's reputation for providing exceptional customer service.



THE BIG PAYDAY

Sarmazian Brothers hosts a large, one-day sale once a year that consists of great savings, food, various festivities and giveaways. This is one of the company's most profitable and heavily advertised events that can bring in revenues exceeding \$500,000 in one day.

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sarmazian brothers

ONTARIO, CANADA

Sarmazian Brothers was started in 1986 in Guelph, Ontario, by Raffi Sarmazian's father and three uncles. The company has continued to grow and develop due to their capable and customer-oriented staff under the direction of an experienced management team. At present, 60% of the company's business is residential construction with the remainder focused on insurance property management and retail.

With Sarmazian Brothers operating at two locations and looking into a third, Raffi Sarmazian, co-owner, is seeking to reinvent the business every five years. To keep customers intrigued, he plans on periodically changing the appearance of the showroom and updating product assortment.

Inventive spirit: Raffi Sarmazian's father and uncles invented the Kneeless Carpet Stretcher while they were carpet installers. The product is now sold worldwide.



DEFINING MOMENT

Sarmazian Brothers took a huge leap forward when it joined the NFA in 2011. That has allowed the current owners to communicate with—and learn from—other successful businesses while creating a more solid relationship with their suppliers. Earlier this year Sarmazian Brothers earned Armstrong Elite Dealer status. "Armstrong is a recognized brand name in flooring and our enhanced partnership has positively benefited our business," Raffi Sarmazian said.

Happy 25th Anniversary NFA

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DEFINING MOMENT

Star Flooring had to reinvent itself when big boxes came on the scene. One of the biggest changes was operating flooring as a separate division. This allowed the company to narrow the focus of each team of employees to just one major Star product type and in turn focus deeper on its targeted flooring customers.

competitive edge

Star Flooring’s mission is to lead its industry by providing the best value in quality products and customer service for the construction, improvement and maintenance of the home. Reliable contractors do the installation of all of its products and the customer receives both product and installer’s warranties. Being a member of the NFA has provided Star Flooring with access to private label products and the ability to share best practices with other members.



PROVEN PROMOTION

Star Flooring’s most successful promotions in the retail segment are its Stainmaster private sales. The company also has multiple events annually, including a gathering at one of Star’s residences where attendees can drive NASCAR vehicles and enjoy the mountains in Colorado.

star flooring

WICHITA, KAN.

Since Earl Goebel founded Star in 1939, Star Lumber & Supply has grown into a major Kansas corporation with more than 300 employees and operates three company divisions: Star Lumber & Supply, Star Flooring & Decorating and Perfection Structural Components.

Star Lumber & Supply is part of both lumberyard and home center. The company has been in the flooring business for over 50 years and a member of the NFA for more than 20 years.

Community driven: “We are just a family-owned business that cares about its customers and employees, and loves to compete and win,” said Roger Voge, president of the OKC Flooring Division. “Each year, 10% of our profits are contributed to charities and we have a strong history of employee involvement in charitable events. All these variables make it a fun place to work.”



DEFINING MOMENT

There are three defining moments for Sterling: becoming a ShawTrustmark dealer in the early 1990s, which pushed Sterling into the cut order business; becoming a Stainmaster Flooring Center in 2000, which helped change how it sold carpet on the retail side; and most recently in 2015, when Sterling was asked to join the NFA, which connected the company to a network of dealers and vendors.

competitive edge Sterling Carpet and Flooring prides itself on delivering the utmost customer experience and developing trust within the community in hopes of cultivating a long-term customer. “Our salespeople are very hands on through the whole process, and everyone that works here—whether it be the warehouse manager, sales force, installers, owners—treats our customers like family. No job is too small and no request too big, and we feel this mentality has really set us apart from the competition,” Dan Mandel said.



PROVEN FORMULA

Sterling does not run many sales/promotions, nor has it advertised in 50-plus years. Instead, the company focuses on the customer experience and getting referrals. Sterling uses its wide inventory to drive business and sell at competitive prices.

sterling carpet

ANAHEIM, CALIF.

Sterling was founded in 1962 in Orange County, Calif. Rich Mandel and his business partner, John Ernst, purchased the store in 1987 with no experience in flooring, other than knowing the fuzzy side went up. As son Dan put it, “We have grown up quite a bit from then and diversified from only stocking rolls of carpet to expanding into all flooring surfaces.”

Two years ago Dan bought the store from Rich and his partner; he said he looks forward to continuing the legacy they built.

The boys: Rich Mandel and his partner, John Ernst, are known as “The Boys.” The name originated from Queen Carpet owner and flooring legend Julian Saul back in 1987. At the ripe ages of 68, they are still called The Boys by many vendors and customers.



competitive edge

Preferred status with vendors such as Mohawk and Shaw gives The Floor Store access to attractive products, prices and financing programs that are hard to shop around. In 2012, The Floor Store was awarded Mohawk's prestigious Retailer of the Year honor. "We pride ourselves on offering a level of customer service that large retailers can't match," Flick said.

CONSUMER INCENTIVES GALORE

One recent campaign invited The Floor Store customers to sign up online to receive up to \$500 off their next flooring purchase of a qualifying product. The retailer also works closely with Synchrony Financial to help consumers finance larger purchases.

the floor store

SAN FRANCISCO

Larry Flick founded The Floor Store with a single location in Richmond, Calif., in April of 1983. He leveraged his many years of experience in the floor covering industry thanks to his family's long history in the business. Growing up near Dalton, Flick spent his early years in the heart of carpet country.

The Floor Store showrooms offer customers the ability to browse an enormous selection of carpet, area rugs, hardwood, vinyl, laminate flooring, natural stone, bamboo and cork. The Richmond branch claims to have the "most extensive collection of flooring solutions" in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Following the path: As the third in a family of four children, Larry Flick learned the ins and outs of textiles and flooring from his father, Robert Flick, who owned RJ Flick Associates for more than 50 years. By his late teens, Larry had already embarked on his career in the business.



DEFINING MOMENT

After running wholesale and manufacturing businesses in Georgia, Larry Flick moved to the West Coast and shifted his focus to retail operations. He went from opening the Jacuzzi Street location in Richmond to becoming the owner and CEO of one of the largest stocking retailers in Northern California. Today, Flick oversees the operations of eight Floor Store locations.





DEFINING MOMENT

A significant change was when Worldwide Wholesale decided to “take over” installation. Prior to then, it sold only material and turned the customer over to an independent installation contractor. The company’s takeover not only improved the consumer experience and service, but increased sales and profits.

competitive edge

Worldwide Wholesale occupies 30,000 to 50,000-square-foot stores throughout central/northern New

Jersey. While it uses that space to feature inventory of certain product categories including carpet remnant rolls, remnants and area rugs, it merchandises hard surface in its own oversized display vehicles and panels to create a very unique shopping experience. From Worldwide Wholesale’s highly trained salespeople, to its technological advanced services, the company offers an easy and convenient experience for any home improvement flooring project.

PROVEN INITIATIVE

Worldwide Wholesale started promoting various products by the room rather than per square foot. Many consumers can’t relate to a square foot price, however the concept of a room price is very simple, Braunstein said. The company promotes this concept year-round via television, radio, digital ads and eblasts.

worldwide wholesale

EDISON, N.J.

Worldwide Wholesale opened its first store in Edison, N.J., in September 1991. The original location was a 50,000 square-foot warehouse that had previously been occupied by Lockheed Martin. “We racked the building and stocked it with remnants, rolls, and pallets of wood and ceramic tiles,” said Darren Braunstein, executive vice president and COO. “It was the first of its kind and began and 15-year run of sales and profit growth.” This September marks 25 years for Worldwide Wholesale.

All in the family: It is truly a family affair at Worldwide Wholesale, which has more than a dozen family members working throughout the operation. While mixing family and business is not always an easy proposition, Braunstein said in their case “our family team is broken down with minimally conflicting responsibilities and very few disagreements.”





DEFINING MOMENT

About 13 years ago Yates Flooring Center decided to buy and move into a centrally located shopping center. The company transformed the 125,000-square-foot, depressed property into a thriving retail environment that now includes a furniture store, a bank, State Farm Insurance office and a restaurant. Yates operates about half the footprint of the property and has more than doubled its business since then.

competitive edge

Years ago Yates Flooring Center made the commitment to maintain a high in-store inventory in order to have products available for immediate purchase. As such, Yates buys large truckloads of products it can leverage with its considerable buying power. "We believe heavily in inventory, product and buying right," said Bobby Yates, owner. "It's about bellying up to the bar and putting your money where your mouth is."



PROVEN PROMOTION

The West Texas Parade of Homes is an annual event that draws thousands. Yates typically provides flooring for 25 to 30 homes in the parade; at the same time the company does television ads and videos for each builder and their homes. This allows the builders to showcase their homes and promote Yate Flooring Center.

yates flooring center

LUBBOCK, TEXAS

Yates Flooring Center is a family-owned business founded in 1976 under the leadership of Bobby and Becky Yates. The business has grown to become one of the largest flooring stores in America located at one address (it opened a second location in Midland in 2015), yet it remains a family business that serves the west Texas/eastern New Mexico area.

Yates Flooring Center is a large-volume purchaser, which allows it to provide the best products at the most aggressive pricing in the marketplace.



City champions: When you think of Lubbock, Texas, your first thought may be football; however, Yates has made a name for itself on the links as several staffers are accomplished golfers, including city champions.

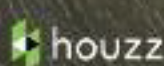
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