



## my take

# A holy 'Alliance'

It had been a number of years since I last attended an Alliance Flooring/CarpetsPlus Color Tile/Carpetland convention. No slight to the group. It was always just a matter of timing. After Carpet One and Flooring America and Shaw Flooring Network and Surfaces and Abbey, by the time late February rolled around, I was spent. Plus, I try to save my weekends for...me.

But this year was different. Alliance was celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We had published the special supplement for the group that rides along with the issue you are holding. It was in Atlanta, which is not too far from some of the industry's major manufacturers. And last but not least, the group asked me to speak. Consider it the perfect storm.

On top of that, after having dinner with and getting to know Ron and Ryan Dunn better than I had, I knew there would be an element of fun. And I was curious how the members of this group as well as the event itself would compare to the Carpet Ones and Abbeys and Flooring Americas of the world.

As the final curtain fell on day three of the show, to say I came away both surprised and impressed would be an understatement. It's a different feel, a different flavor than the other retail group events. It's by far and away the least regimented

event, and the members appreciate it.

Ryan Dunn and Kevin Logue, sons of the respective founders Ron and Jon, want to inject more fun than some of the speakers you're accustomed to seeing at retail buying group shows. Ryan and Kevin are young and energetic. Much of their presentation style is off the cuff rather than teleprompter perfect. Yet somehow, the message comes across just as professional. And if a presentation goes 15 minutes longer than scheduled, or if members linger on a break 10 minutes longer than it should, or Ryan Dunn wants to speak from the heart for 5 minutes more, so what? No one seems to mind.

The average member is smaller than the typical Carpet One, Flooring America or Abbey member. Ron Dunn told me the average member does about \$1.8 million. Certainly not chump change by any standard. But what sets this group apart is a family feel on the part of members unlike anything I have seen before. Group leadership is family, and that feel trickles down to the smallest member.

With that family feel comes networking opportunities. When it came to instances where members sought help from fellow members, more owners were able to cite the specific person and related issue where they sought and received guidance.

The other unique aspect is autonomy. No product or program is mandatory. Members get to pick and participate in as much as they want or as little. Its showroom concept, dubbed Destination, is as impressive as any private-label display out there. This year, Ryan Dunn announced the number of members who signed up for Destination more than doubled the total heading into convention.

And like any other group there were breakouts on web, social media, marketing, etc., which members said make them more professional than they ever would have been on their own.

And then you have Ron Dunn's Drive Across America, where for the last six years he and his wife, Sandy, pack up the RV and visit 18-35 members two or three times a year. At last count only 54 have not yet had the pleasure of a visit, something Ron hopes to rectify this year. It's that closeness between leadership and member that stands out.

It's hard to believe this group was born in a 10 x 10 booth in the basement of Surfaces 1997. They've certainly come a long way.

Steven Feldman