

Alliance Flooring marks 20 years of growth

By Ken Ryan

ATLANTA — This year's Alliance Flooring conference coincided with a significant milestone: 20 years in the business. But the event also provided a glimpse into what's shaping up to be a promising future for the nearly 400-member group.

"We know who our team is, what our core is," Ron Dunn, co-founder and co-CEO of Alliance Flooring, told CarpetsPlus, Color Tile and Carpetland members during his keynote speech. "We are going to grow. This room is going to get bigger, and we are going to grab more market share."

While Ron Dunn and Jon Logue, the co-founders and co-CEOs, are the current leaders, the next generation—Ryan Dunn and Kevin Logue—has been actively involved in running the business for years and is poised to carry the baton in the future.

"Our members can rest assured the future leadership is already in place—no other buying group can say that," said Ryan Dunn, co-COO and vice president of sales. "We have many second-generation businesses in our group—probably 35% of our members are second generation. Kevin and I are second generation so we have grown up together with many of our members."

Raising the bar was a major theme at the conference. To illustrate the point, an actual pole vault apparatus was set up on stage. Interestingly, Jon Logue was a pole vaulter in high school and he took the stage to make a mock attempt at clearing the bar. Touching on that theme, Ron Dunn asked members, "We have three choices: We could walk away, we could lower the bar or we could raise the bar. With this group we are going to continue to raise it."

One important component in raising the bar on retail performance is through the Destination showroom concept. The Destination portfolio includes up to 10 private-label displays offering the best products from the premier carpet mills and hard surface manufacturers in easy-to-use, easy-to-sell formats emphasizing style, design and larger samples. Here's the best part: Alliance dealers are not forced to take any displays if they don't want to.

Prior to convention, 28 members had signed up for the Destination program. Alliance Flooring executives hoped to pull in another 20 or so. By the convention's second day it had already signed 37 members, bringing to 65 the total number of Destination dealers.

"We knocked it out of the park," said Kevin Logue, co-COO and vice president of marketing. "We don't tell members what to do; it's their choice. However, in today's market you have to keep improving your showroom. Flooring is about fashion and design, and the Destination concept offers the tools to help our retailers evolve their businesses and achieve those goals."

Josh Elder, co-owner of Gainesville CarpetsPlus Color Tile, sits on the buying committee that helped develop the program. For him, the best part of the Des-



Ryan Dunn, co-COO, Ron Dunn, co-CEO, Sandy Dunn, Nancy Logue, Jon Logue, co-CEO and Kevin Logue, co-COO of Alliance Flooring

tinuation program is the 56-pin carpet displays because they free up so much room. "Every inch of my showroom has a cost associated with it, and I want the biggest bang for my buck."

Eric Langan, president/owner of Carpetland USA (The Langan Group), Davenport, Iowa, said his main takeaway is the Alliance Flooring group still puts an emphasis on networking and collaboration within the group. "The sense of family was mentioned frequently here. While we have freedom to make whatever decisions we deem best for our business, it is important to know we can get more accomplished more quickly if we march together as a group instead of individual store owners."

Mike Montgomery, vice president of Montgomery's CarpetsPlus Color Tile, Venice, Fla., said the beauty of this convention is members are fully invested in the group. "Unlike some groups, they don't withhold our rebate checks unless we come to convention. Our members genuinely want to be here."

Alliance Flooring, which welcomed 20 new members in 2016, converted two prospects at this year's show. The expectation is for at least double-digit member growth in 2017.

Observers attribute Alliance Flooring's success to its laser focus on members' success and the close relationship management has with its retail partners. "Their leadership is amazingly approachable not only to their members, but also to vendors and all who are committed to success," said Scott Humphrey, WFCAs chairman and CEO, who also delivered a keynote presentation during the conference. "Ron and Jon bring vast experience to the table. They are not bound by traditional ways of doing business in the flooring industry. By far the greatest trait that makes doing business with CarpetsPlus a pleasure is the fact that their leadership is truly committed to the success of the members. They

care at the personal and professional levels. That is rare in the business world today."

Suppliers' support

In addition to new retail members, Alliance Flooring announced four more suppliers to the group: Beauflor (LVT, rigid core), Bolyu Commercial (commercial carpet, LVT), Southwind (residential carpet, WPC and dryback LVT) and Tarkett (luxury vinyl plank and tile, resilient sheet and laminate).

Beauflor has received plaudits recently for its Pure Click featuring a patented 360 locking system that allows mechanics to install the product in patterns, boards or quarter-turn the material from one room to the other without the need for transitions. Kevin Logue sees Beauflor as the next USFloors or another IVC. "In three years they are going to be huge—once they get distribution up and running."

Likewise, existing vendors attested to their strong partnership with Alliance Flooring dealers. Sam Ruble, vice president of sales for USFloors, called the relationship "refreshing." It doesn't hurt that USFloors doubled its business with the CarpetsPlus group in 2016 and is poised for an even bigger 2017. "I am a farm boy from Ohio, and to me these people are so down to earth and genuine, they really make me feel like my neighbors."

Karndean, a longstanding member with CarpetsPlus, was named Hard Surface Supplier of the Year by the CarpetsPlus membership at the show. Throughout the past year, the prominent LVT supplier has worked closely with CarpetsPlus to produce Design Destination, a private-label merchandising system that is part of the Destination program. "We love these guys," said Tim Hanno, vice president of retail sales. "We have a great relationship with this group. They more than meet us halfway. There is a level of trust here."