

Business is truly a family affair at Alliance Flooring

By Ken Ryan

TUCSON, ARIZ — Not since the heady pre-recession days has Alliance Flooring and its dealers been in such a sweet spot: an improving economy; a growing, contented membership; exciting programs coming of age and a supplier network that treats the annual convention as if it were a family reunion.

The 2018 annual convention held here last month amplified those good vibes—from co-CEO Ron Dunn’s opening Power of 10 talk to the Oscars-like awards dinner to close the show.

Suppliers were uniform in their support and appreciation of Alliance Flooring—which comprises CarpetsPlus/Color Tile and Carpetland USA—and its membership. “Alliance Flooring is an extended family; they treat suppliers as partners and appreciate all of our efforts,” said Kelly Oberschlake, senior director, residential sales, for Mohawk, which won Supplier of the Year (see page 27).

Tim Hanno, vice president of retail sales, Karndean Designflooring, said Karndean has a great relationship with all the buying groups, but “this one just takes it to another level entirely. We love this group and the family atmosphere that exists here. It’s like you’re going to a family picnic. This business is about relationship sales, and this is a great relationship.”

Ann McDermott, vice president, national accounts, Shaw Industries, agreed. “It’s not like coming to a convention; it’s more like coming to a family reunion. This group is special.”

In the past year, Alliance Flooring has added 18 members, bringing to 370 the number of retailer members, which represents well over 400 storefronts. About one-third is part of the Destination program, which was launched in 2015 and is now in its fourth phase. What started as a carpet boutique within the showroom has expanded into hard surface and continues to evolve. “It is the most successful program ever for CarpetsPlus,” said Kevin Logue, co-COO and vice president of marketing. “We will continue to expand the program, especially in hard surfaces.”

In 2018, CarpetsPlus will add 12 new private-label programs to Destination, which is offered to members on an a la carte basis. Members don’t have to take on any elements but are encouraged to do so as research shows the average selling price of products within a Des-

tinuation showroom goes up \$1 to \$2 per yard. “Destination has definitely created a buzz, and more suppliers want in on the program,” said Ryan Dunn, co-COO and vice president of sales.

Before convention there were 116 stores in the program. By the end of the second day, there were 121 members in the program—and that number is expected to rise.

“We have some progressive plans to grow this company,” Logue explained. “We’re adding new vendors; we have suppliers coming to us now. As for retailer members, we have to be very selective who we let in. We have spent a lot of time researching the industry and we are not just trying to sign up anyone. They have to be open and willing to share their best practices.”

That willingness to share best practices, to help each other in need, is one of the hallmarks of the Alliance Flooring group that stands out for retailers like Ben Case, owner of Carpet Collection, Lockport, N.Y. “We can have open-book discussions with almost any member we want. This allows growth for my business in avoiding the pitfalls others have experienced. Other members are just a phone call away, and most look forward to helping another member; I know I do.”

Bob Dauenhauer, owner, Carpet World, Bismarck, N.D., concurred. “If you have any questions you could go to any one of the dealers and they will help you out. It’s the friendliest group you could be with.”

It’s not just a cliché with Alliance Flooring—the group really does work with each other and can serve as a supplier/distributor when necessary. One example is the relationship between Montgomery’s CarpetsPlus Color Tile in Venice, Fla., and Gainesville CarpetsPlus Color Tile, located roughly 200 miles apart—not exactly around the corner. Still, when Montgomery’s was out of stock on a particular product that it needed, it turned not to a supplier but to Josh Elder, who runs the Gainesville store. He delivered the goods in a timely manner and sent them the invoice. Scores of these examples were retold at convention.

New offerings

Alliance Flooring has added 40 LVT-type products since September, and the combined LVT/WPC/SPC category now represents 20% of its mill shipments; resilient sheet makes up another 10%. Carpet is now at 39%, down from 80% in 2002. “I never thought in my days that I would see carpet at 39% for our group,” Logue said. “Meanwhile, LVT is going off. My phone is ringing once, maybe twice a week from people who say, ‘Hey, you want to see my rigid core line?’”



Ron Dunn, co-CEO, Ryan Dunn, co-COO, Kevin Logue, co-COO & Jon Logue, co-CEO of Alliance Flooring

Rather than take them all in, Alliance chooses roughly five “winning” lines for its members, with WPC and SPC commanding equal time. As Logue explained, “We are never going to be the group that has 35 suppliers in one category. We pick the right ones. We boiled down our LVT business to five lines because we need to put our members in a position to be as competitive as they can be in their own markets.”

This year’s new offerings include denser, more rigid cores; wider and longer planks; and tile and stone visuals in larger formats. The lineup features Shaw’s new Floorte Pro products (48 SKUs) and COREtec Stone. “No other group is showing this right now—we think this product is going to be hot,” Logue said.

The carpet introductions “are pretty short and sweet this year,” Logue noted. Leading the way are Anso Foundations and Bellera from Shaw and Dixie’s Pet-Protect Destination.

For Color Tile dealers, ProGen from Tarkett and Korlok from Karndean are new offerings in rigid. “This is their foray into the floating arena,” Logue said of Karndean. “They really did their homework and took their time in bringing this to market.” Laminate represents 4% of the group’s sales but has stabilized, Logue said. “We feel the waterproof story is compelling.” To that end, Mohawk’s RevWood, a new waterproof collection, will fill that niche.

Alliance Flooring welcomed several new suppliers. Phenix Flooring is the replacement for Beaulieu, which was acquired by Engineered Floors in 2017. Phenix is expected to help Alliance dealers in the area of solution-dyed products.

Peerless (which is Beaulieu Canada; however, legally the name Beaulieu cannot be used in the U.S.) is a new member with a familiar name running the program—Greg Payne, formerly with Shaw. Also new is DuChateau. “We needed a higher-end line,” Logue noted. “I have been after them for two years. DuChateau is a good pickup for us.”



Members checking out great deals at Rush Hour.