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Kevin Logue, Jon Logue, Ron Dunn and Ryan Dunn

FEATURE

Honoring its past, present & future

Alliance Flooring celebrates its 25th Anniversary

By Amy Rush-Imber

[Orlando] As Alliance Flooring comes together in Orlando this month to meet with its members and vendors, and celebrate its 25th Anniversary and growth of its CarpetsPlus and COLORTILE brands, *FCW* spoke with co-CEO Ron Dunn about the group's founding, impact and transformation over the years.

"We started with a vision of pooling together the resources and relationships needed to help make good things happen in our industry," Dunn shared. "The focus was on the right mix of independent flooring retailers and core suppliers and together develop added benefits and a working relationship that would be a win for everyone. That same goal is in place today. This mission of making good things happen for other people hangs in our entrance as a reminder of why we exist."

Part of the initial mission, that still holds today, was to develop and offer Alliance members a menu of benefits to choose from. "How we bring them to the street continually evolves," he said, making it clear that members are able to choose from the menu without mandates. "What doesn't change is the fact that in every gathering, the smartest entity in the room is always the 'Cumulative IQ.' The greatest and most meaningful benefit that we can bring to our members is the effective networking of input, ideas, experiences and each store's best practices."

Dunn also noted that communication has been key to success. "We do this through a member backroom that is active and interactive, visiting our stores and sharing their stories and also sponsoring member-hosted Summits. Through the years, the trajectory of many of our stores changed because of what they saw and experienced first-hand at various Summits. Highly successful, seasoned flooring retailer owners and managers have literally tapped the side of their heads while touring host stores and exclaimed, 'I never thought of that.' The benefits of getting an inside, in-depth tour of another flooring retailer's successful operation is rare and it is priceless," he asserted, adding, "Our commitment and delivery in these areas separates us from other groups in the industry."

DECADES OF CHANGE

The flooring industry and the state of retail has indeed changed over the last

two decades and a half, and Alliance Flooring has been right there for the transformation.

"When we started 25 years ago, many of today's important business components like the internet, websites, social media, smart phones, sophisticated systems software and even consumer credit offerings did not exist," Dunn reflected. "Department stores, furniture stores and national chains like Sears were all major players. They used their company specific private credit card offering with extended payment options as an advantage over independent stores. Home Depot and Lowes were just getting started. Carpet was 80 percent of the product mix. There were well over 30 different suppliers. Large blankets were the preferred way to show product samples."

And retail too changed, he recounted. "Retail showrooms across the country commonly had the appearance of a messy, mixed and matched, shuffled array of various displays. Other industries were moving forward in simplifying and cleaning up showrooms for a more consumer-friendly experience. Our industry needed to do the same."

And, Dunn asserted, his organization was right there on the front lines of change. "We became part of the movement toward sample flip cards with swatches. We invested in and prioritized showroom makeovers featuring congruent displays with consumer-friendly and educational showroom enhancements. We purchased the COLORTILE brand in 2002 as a lead in the movement into hard surface with our members," he said.

STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Over the last 25 years, businesses have experienced significant challenges from the Great Recession to the early days of the pandemic.

"The recession in 2009 hit our indus-



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— RON DUNN

try's retailers hard. To navigate through this and eventually come out of it as stronger, well-oiled and more efficient machines required change," Dunn reported. "In the midst of the great run our industry had experienced, it became too easy and common for retailers to grow fat and even sloppy. The housing bubble burst and related fears brought business to a screeching halt. Bank terms stiffened overnight. It was not a time to be left alone to individual thinking and limited strategy. The value and importance of networking and Cumulative IQ showed like never before."

That dynamic came right back into play during the spring of 2020 when COVID hit, he said. "After a half day of wondering what on earth was going to happen, we got on the phone and

on Zoom. Our members showed their amazing strength, resolve and resourcefulness. The fear curve was flattened quickly. The learning curve was instant in everything from showroom safety to securing PPP funds and how to creatively grow business during a pandemic."

REAL RELATIONSHIPS

But through it all, Dunn and his team have helped both its retail members and suppliers succeed. "We have great supplier relationships and our core suppliers continually report that as a group our members outpace the industry in sales growth. Suppliers continually tell us that within two years of a retailer joining our group, they see an increase in sales and stronger business practices."

It is, he said, the relationships fostered that have kept both members and vendors meaningful to each other both in business and personally. "We

can't have a business without that and all the contributing pieces, but the reason this happens and the place where we have succeeded the most is in being a conduit for great relationships across the country. Being a part of these types of meaningful, growing relationships is our biggest joint success."

SILVER ANNIVERSARY SENTIMENT

While Dunn and the Alliance team are geared up to celebrate this momentous occasion, celebrating 25 years also leads to deep reflection.

"Anyone who has started or bought a business knows the early uncomfortable feeling is self-examination," he pondered. "Something inside flamed this, but did I do the right thing? Did we take the right risk?"

Still, there are many firsts and defining moments that deserve celebrating. "The first supplier to support our start up, the first members who believed in the vision and joined a group that wasn't yet a group; these were huge highlights, the dynamics of which we still celebrate today."

But for Dunn and his co-CEO Jon Logue, perhaps the sweetest step in the journey was bringing their sons onboard and watching them make their marks on the group. "For Jon and me, having our sons continue to grow, step into their leadership roles and show how much they care about everything our company does is extremely gratifying," he shared.

Bringing the next generation in is also about ensuring Alliance thrives for the next 25 years. "We have been able to sit with and learn from second, third and fourth generation retailers that are long term members of our group," Dunn said. "Deliberate succession planning is vitally important for ongoing success. We made the commitment years ago to plan well ahead."

For more on Alliance Flooring's 25th Anniversary, see FCW1.com.

