



FCICA: It's Not Just About Installation Anymore

By Louis Iannaco

SAN ANTONIO—The Floor Covering Installation Contractors Association (FCICA) has come a long way over the years, surviving several highs and lows. But with fresh new leadership at the helm, better communication than ever before with other industry associations and an optimistic vision of its present and future, the organization seems headed for a steady period of growth for years to come.

And with its positive path laid before it, FCICA is aimed at letting the industry know it is not just about installation anymore. "Over the course of the history of this organization," said Christopher Capobianco, the association's new chairman, who also noted FCICA will be celebrating its 25th anniversary next year, "it started out as installation workrooms and so the focus was really on installation as what we did and what our training and our educational sessions were about.

"But as time has gone on," he told *FCNews*, "the business has changed. Traditional flooring workrooms are now selling flooring products, so they are selling floor covering and floor covering installation. And so our focus has really changed to be more about how to run a commercial flooring business. So you can see, from our educational topics, some of them are product-related, some of them are installation-related and some of them are just really business-related, so it's a much more broad scope of what we do, what our members do and how we focus the training and education we offer.

"We have worked very hard to let people know that FCICA is about people in the commercial flooring business," explained Capobianco, "dealers and contractors, manufacturers and distributors, and now, consultants and inspectors, with the focus on commercial business. Not so much that we don't have members who do other business, but the primary focus is com-

mercial business."

With just under 200 members, the organization has put a top priority on growth. According to Capobianco, FCICA's long-range planning committee has set a goal that by 2007/08 the association "would be at about 250."

"But we won't complain if it grows faster," added Kim Oderkirk, FCICA's executive vice president.

With just under 100 people attending the show, which included several educational seminars and the association's annual associate/member Tabletop Trade Show Exhibit, the event received rave reviews from both vendors and members alike. The show's theme was "Corral Your Resources," as members were asked to use resources pro-



FCICA's chairman Christopher Capobianco and executive vice president Kimberly Oderkirk.

vided by both the association and the industry to help educate themselves while increasing profitability.

Topics touched on were FCICA's FIT (Floorcovering Installation Training) program for carpet, resilient, and soon, ceramic and stone, which is basically an in-house installer program; and FCICA's TechNet program, a group of volunteer industry experts the association has gathered to answer whatever floor covering questions members

have. The Resilient Reference Guide, based on the FIT program, which contains resilient installation "by the book" for salespeople, mill reps, inspectors and architects, was also discussed.

As Capobianco mentioned, a wide range of seminars was featured, including his own, "The Fascinating World of Cork," to "Understanding Flooring Substrates," by a panel including Kim Laurienzo of DRIcore, Martin Murdoch of M.E. Sabosik Associates and Seth Pevarnik of Ardex/Henry; and "Negotiating a Contract You Can Live With" by attorney Thomas Walthall of the Gardner Law Firm. Wilsonart's Randy Phillips also led a class on "Understanding the Different Grades of Laminate Flooring Being Considered for Commercial Applications."

"From the few [seminar] surveys that I glanced at," said Capobianco, "they were getting very high marks. On a scale of one to four, there were a lot of fours on how much people got out of them, which I think is a good compliment to the convention committee who originally put the topics out there to the members."

Another part of the evolution of FCICA, he noted, just as the growing popularity of resilient flooring has been addressed by the association in recent years, "now, for us, for our FIT Training program, ceramic tile is the next category we are going to have out there as far as availability of a written training curriculum." As the association will be coming out with its own books on tile soon, Oderkirk noted, "next year we will probably hit on tile during our seminars. This will bring our education in line with what we are doing with our training."

"The show has been absolutely fantastic," said Gary Kloth of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. "The program this morning could have gone on for another hour just by questions from the audience, with all the activity and interest going on."

"It has been outstanding, a great show," said new member and first-time attendee, Jim Motter of the Floor Connection in San Luis Obispo, Calif. "We're hearing a lot of informative things. I've had some great conversations with the other contractors as well as the vendors. I learned a lot about the new products at the Tabletop show here today.

"Another thing I learned a ton about yesterday was cork," he explained. "I didn't know anything about it; now I've learned a ton. As a matter of fact, yesterday we were awarded a project with 1,500 feet of cork. So I have the resource to talk to now if I have questions.

"The information from the attorney today was awesome," added Motter. "I actually have my office manager going through contracts right now because we are going to visit an attorney next week. The reason for this is, I've heard some things that have concerned me. That one aspect alone may save my business thousands of dollars right there."

Bob Baker, manager of installation & maintenance for J&J/Invision, said his visit to the convention marked a return for him to the FCICA. "I've been on the carpet manufacturing side for 28 years and was involved with FCICA back in its early days. The organization seems like it is the premiere group for the installation contractors, and it's a group we try to attach ourselves to in the form of being pro-active to prevent problems."

"It's a very informative show, I've really enjoyed it" said another first-timer, Jeff Unger of L&R Floors in Washington, D.C. "I like the fact that I have met all these nice people and that I can call on them when I need them. The things that I have already learned since I've been here have been great. I've got to take this information back and pass it along to my installers.

"The contract knowledge is something I have needed to learn more about," he added. "I'm in the process of getting more into that. The refresher on floor preparation, which is the key to any good installation, that was very informative."

"I've come here under two different pretenses now," said Peter Austin of Austin Consulting. "I was here previously as a representative of a flooring manufacturer. So, I've viewed my membership in FCICA from that point of view, and now I'm here as an independent consultant. So I have a whole

Chairs past. From left, first row, Bill Becker, Fred Acton, and Paula Murdoch; second row, Gary Kloth, Jim Dipelesi and Marty Murdoch; third row, current chairman Christopher Capobianco and immediate past chairman Bill Dietrich.



new viewpoint, especially for the Tabletop show. I can see now how important it is for these manufacturer/vendors to be able to interface with contractors and installers, to be able to present their products in a face-to-face way.

"At this type of venue, where people are here to learn so many other things," he added, "this is like the frosting on the cake as far as manufacturers are concerned."

"They are constantly changing products," said Murdoch. "Five years ago, laminate products were virtually unheard of in commercial flooring. As a commercial flooring contractor, I can tell you laminates are here to stay, and they are getting better. So, we have to learn the new products.

"I am now using laminates commercially and it is because of learning about it at places like this," he continued. "I can't say how much that is worth to my company.

"That, plus talking to the technical service people in the industry," added Murdoch, "gives me a comfortable feeling for when I need to call out, I'm not just calling some 800 number to say, 'Gee, I have a problem with your product.' Instead, it's, 'Randy, tell me what I did wrong and how you can help me correct it.'"

Vendors Enjoy Positive Showing

The members weren't the only ones who enjoyed the convention. The vendors who displayed their wares during the Tabletop Trade Show also left with a smile.

"The contractors who come here are very high quality," said Tom Guilfoyle, national accounts manager

for Chapco, "and that makes it a very worthwhile event."

"It's been quite a show," said Benny Wood, president of Advanced Adhesive Technology (AAT). "The seminars have been long enough to have discussions and get everything we need from the speakers. At the Tabletop show, people are coming by as they're supposed to and we're getting the opportunity to talk to them."

"The show has been going great," said Michelle Swiniarski, floor covering installation system product manager for Mapei. "There has been a lot of participation and networking, along with opportunities to demonstrate new products and speak to people one-on-one. It very nice that people are this open and can share their experiences with each other, and help share best practices."

"Our vision is to be the association of choice in the flooring industry," concluded Capobianco, "and to promote and protect the best interest of floor covering contractors. Our mission is to provide our members with continuing education, access to cutting-edge technology, and networking opportunities so as to assist them in achieving their business goals."

