

INSTALL – Everyone Talks Training UBC Delivers

Floor covering is an installed product and until it is installed and installed properly, it has no value to anyone; it's simply ballast. Installation has been said to be the bane of the floor covering industry for years. Complaints about the installers' attitude, skill level, training, pricing, reliability and professionalism have created rifts between manufacturers and flooring contractors for longer than anyone wants to admit. Installers and installation have often been viewed as a necessary

evil – not exactly the best situation to have for any installed product. Though much has been said about installation issues relative to this matter, very little has actually been done about it. Organizations have tried to elevate the status of the installer and the quality of work and manufacturers have made some efforts with training programs for specific groups. Even individual flooring contractors and government entities, such as New York State prison system, have put forth programs to train floor covering installers. But for the most part no one has really had a comprehensive program that trains installers as apprentices, introducing them to the trade and continues a process of education and training that leads to journeyman status, and continues indefinitely, except for the INSTALL program.



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Some comments we've heard recently from flooring contractors and manufacturers are: "The biggest challenge we face is lack of skilled labor. We are actively recruiting and raising compensation to attract and retain the most skilled labor." "Sometimes it can be very hard to find trained people." "We're out of control with the business we have and are constantly looking for skilled installation craftsman." "No matter how many installers we try to train or get from trade schools; it's never enough." These are the types of comments heard around the industry all the time. And, just so you know, it's not just the floor covering installers' trade that is crying for new recruits. All areas of skilled labor are suffering because many young people want to work with computers or find another line of work that is more "glorified". The skilled labor trades offer some of the best

opportunities available and the fewer the candidates the more the opportunity exists. As for glorified, the INSTALL program can make true artisans of installers whose work will be displayed as "floor art" in many cases. There's a lot to be said for the sense of accomplishment and pride felt when completing a hand skill project. The sense of pride from successfully completing the installation of beautiful floor covering material is one of the most satisfying and gratifying. Those magnificent looking floors in casinos, hotels, department stores, restaurants, airports, public and private buildings and every type of building that exists are all created by floor covering installers. The most beautiful of them are created by the most highly skilled and trained installers- the true craftsmen. These are the types of installers trained by the INSTALL program.

For those of you who have never heard of the INSTALL program or are unfamiliar with it, it is a comprehensive training program for residential, commercial and institutional floor covering installers

throughout the United States and Canada that utilizes a curriculum for carpet, vinyl, hardwood, laminate, ceramic tile, stone and artificial turf and sports surfaces. INSTALL stands for the International Standards and Training Alliance. It is an alliance of mills, manufacturers, contractors and the floor covering arm of the UBC – The United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. The training is delivered in classrooms and through hands on methods over four years and complies with flooring industry standards and installation guidelines. There is nothing else like this training in the industry and no one else has even considered making the type of \$100+million dollar commitment that has been made by INSTALL. This is the most serious installation training, certifying and marketing endeavor ever undertaken and endorsed by the industry. INSTALL is also a certified education provider for AIA, IIDA and IFMA.

With the products being manufactured by the floorcovering industry becoming more varied and complex in technologies and methods for installation, the overwhelming intricacies of patterns, particularly in the commercial market, the vast amount of work available and construction of new buildings of every kind, the skill level of the people installing these products must keep pace. No longer can one expect to work with a product and think they know how to install it – those days are gone. The changes in backing technologies alone in the last few years will leave those in the dust who have not been exposed to working with these products. They look different, they act different and they install differently.



The Commercial FLOORING REPORT

Lew Migliore
President and Owner

LGM Enterprises, LLC
519 Oxford Street
Dalton, GA 30720

P-(706) 370-5888
F-(706) 270-0482
Email:
lgmtcs@optilink.us

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All this being said there is a need in the market for the INSTALL program both residentially and commercially. Certainly the efforts of CFI (International Certified Floor Covering Installers) have been monumental. Unfortunately the industry has not supported the efforts of Jim Walker and his legion of installers and trainers as they should and this group has literally had to beg for money and support. The INSTALL program is supported by more money, effort and formal training centers than the floor covering industry or any other industry for that matter that makes any kind of installed products, could or would spend the money on. Let me add that I have never met a carpet installer or any flooring installer who is not interested in knowing or learning more about how to do his job better – despite what anyone may think. From the start they would love to have an opportunity for formal training rather than on the job indoctrinations. The trial and error method and the “old ways” do not a craftsman make – it does

however create problems, complaints and installation failures.

Let me share this with you. I just got back from a trip to the West Coast where I met with installers from some of the best high end residential firms out there. These are the best of the best at installing very, very expensive carpet in some of the most expensive homes for some of the most famous people in the country. These guys haven't met a carpet they don't think they can install and if they tell you a product is difficult or impossible to install you had better listen to them. Many of them shared techniques and unique tricks and initiatives they utilize to work with more challenging products. They would love the opportunity to participate in learning more. The pains they suffer in the field working with extraordinarily difficult carpet and flooring products would be lessened exponentially with formal training. They certainly are not going to get that training from the manufacturers, I can assure you. Most manufacturers who produce this type of carpet don't have any installation instructions or tech services staff. We also showed the installers some new products that were going to be introduced at the end of the year and wanted their input on installing them – something virtually no manufacturer does that I know of. In the course of doing this there was one style, beautiful as it was, that was determined to be impossible to install because there is no way to make a proper or acceptable seam in it. It was decided at the end of the trip that this product would never see the light of day – it was eliminated from the line. I would even suggest that all new products could be submitted to the INSTALL training program for review before manufacturer's committed to producing them as a way to save millions in material, complaints and claims issues. In this respect the program could also serve as a testing ground for new floorcovering products, technologies, adhesives, accessories and associated materials. Manufacturers who have no capability to do this could work with INSTALL and use them to help determine if a product could actually be installed.

Since the luxury section of the residential market is still strong, and I am of the opinion it is going to be that way for quite some time, we need installers who can work with these products. This is only going to happen if a new helper is afforded the opportunity

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to work with one of these masters or is trained in a regimented program where he learns all about floorcovering products and how to install them. And just so it's fully understood, the flooring materials being installed today don't have to be high end product; all floorcovering deserves the best installation skills possible and available.

“Consult and/or follow the carpet manufacturer's installation instructions.” This statement only has meaning if the manufacturer actually has installation instructions and if they are pertinent to the product being installed. Today, technology and change in floor covering products is moving faster than the instructions on how to install it. It should come as no surprise that some products hit the street with no installation instructions. Some larger manufacturers do provide installation instructions and assistance and most others don't. They'll direct you to CRI – 104 The Standard for Installation of Commercial Textile Floor Covering Material or guidelines from a particular flooring material organization. As good as these documents are they are only general guidelines and not necessarily product specific. That being the case, unless one has expertise in handling particular flooring material and is well versed in the latest styles and technologies, the installation will be a gamble. Let me give you an example. In a situation just this week our pattern carpet expert, with 35 years of experience, flew to a job site to assist in getting a high profile installation started. He met with one of the manufacturer's technical field installation experts, a gentleman we've known for years and truly an expert in his own right. The primary reason for them both being on site was because the installers working on the job were having problems making the seams. Our guy and the manufacturer's guy worked on the carpet to try to seam it better than the installers trying to put it in. They found, that despite what the manufacturer's instructions said to do, the seams could not be

made well because the construction and design of the carpet would not allow it. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the worst rating and 10 being the best, they were only able to achieve a seam they both rated at 7.9. These were the guys who were the experts; they did only slightly better than the installers who started the job and struggled with it. This carpet proved that it cannot be installed with a good seam. The inherent characteristics of its construction and design prevent it and no matter what, the installation is going to be a problem. It got out the door without anyone really assessing if it could be installed successfully or not.

Given a program that teaches and trains for these unexpected occurrences, that supersedes industry and manufacturer's guidelines and instructions and allows for initial and updated training on the latest developments in carpet construction and design such as the INSTALL program, the installers would have known what to do. They could work with manufacturer's offerings to help them determine if they actually could be installed without a problem. Better yet, they would have known what couldn't be done and why. The product in our example is uninstallable because you can't make an acceptable seam in it. All carpet must be able to be seamed and if it can't be it is not a product that should be on the market. When the manufacturer's own technical field expert can't install the carpet how is anyone else supposed to? The point is that a concerted training program allows for input from both sides and not only benefits the industry by producing better installations but it can also identify floor covering products that can't be installed or present problems that have to be addressed. The INSTALL program, in my opinion, should be accepted across the board by the floor covering industry, supported and made an integral part of the industry to insure that all floor covering materials get the best possible quality of installation available. INSTALL will make that happen. I'm all for it.



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MOISTURE ISSUES

Substrate moisture issues continue to plague the industry and there is not enough solid information in one place to help flooring contractors, manufacturers, architects, designers, construction managers, facilities managers and commercial property owners, understand the intricacies and ramifications of moisture on floor covering failures, concerns and complaints. Tens of Millions of dollars are lost each year on floor covering failures as a result of substrate moisture conditions. To address this issue LGM & Associates is presenting the first and only seminar of its kind "The Concrete – Moisture – and Sub-Surfaces Seminar" being held on October 29, 30 and 31 in Dalton, Georgia. This seminar will offer the most up to date information presented by nationally recognized speakers and instructors specializing in this subject. Peter Craig of Concrete Constructives, Kelly Mortensen of Full Spectrum Flooring Technology, Benny Wood V.P. of LGM and Sim Crisler V.P. of LGM. The program will include

moisture testing and investigation of concrete and other substrate and subfloors as well as the influences of the earth beneath the concrete and the above grade placement of concrete. Also to be covered is moisture testing equipment and methods, proper use of meters, ASTM –F1869 Vapor Emission Testing, ASTM –F710 ph testing procedures and ASTM – F2170 and F2420 Relative Humidity testing and what the test results mean and their interpretation. Also to be covered are adhesives, polymeric and polyvinyl chloride compounds and their affects relative to substrate conditions, installation and product issues and the analysis of on site substrate conditions as they relate to effects on vinyl backed carpet products and plasticizer issues. Contact Anita Drennon at LGM & Associates 706-370-5888 or email lgm_anita@optilink.us Seminar fee is \$959.00 with 10% discounts given for members of FCICA, WFCA, CFI, StarNet, CCA Global, IICRC, AIA, IFMA, IIDA,FIANA, BOMA, NAFCD, Stanley Steemer, and Sherwin Williams.

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