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contract: state of the industry

Uses for wood expand; projects plentiful

By Ken Ryan

The application of wood flooring in commercial venues continues to flourish and has prompted some contractors to expand their business. The Rouse Co. is one example of a flooring contractor that has grown its wood division substantially in response to market demand.

"Our wood business has seen a 10-fold increase in sales volume," said Jeffrey Lascher, chief operating officer of Rancho Mirage, Ca-

lif.-based Rouse Co. (It ranked No. 15 on FCW's list of Top 25 flooring contractors, with 2006 sales of \$31 million, up from \$26.5 million in 2005).

The Rouse Co. does a lot of work in multifunction projects in which the first floor is a retail operation and the above floors are condos or lofts. There has also been increased activity with high rises, upscale hotel properties and restaurants that have required hardwood flooring.

"We run the gamut of wood

— from oak and walnut to maple and bamboo," Lascher said. "Our wood division is rivaling our carpet installation business as far as quality and performance. Wood is right up there."

Rouse Co. is installing wood in a 170,000-square-foot high-rise project in Los Angeles, as well as in a W hotel in Southern California. It is also in the process of installing bamboo for a Disney project and bamboo for Turner Construction in California. "We don't see any slowdown in our wood

business," he said.

For Green Bay, Wis.-based H.J. Martin & Son, the No. 10-ranked flooring contractor with sales of \$38 million in 2006, the biggest challenge in '06 was "just getting work," said senior vice president Wayne Daul.

While commercial work was still available to his contract business, Daul said the company saw margins squeezed a bit, a sentiment echoed by other commercial contractors. Al Breunig, general

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manager, Nonn's Flooring, said sales at his business decreased from 2005 to 2006. "Like most of the country, we experienced a slowdown in our retail/builders business," Breunig said. "Fortunately our commercial business remained strong. However, when you have a shift like that in your customer mix, the challenge for 2006 was maintaining acceptable overall margins."

Green movement takes hold

Flooring contractors throughout the country (especially in California) are seeing green as specifiers, facility managers, building owners and building occupants increasingly demand green buildings, green products and green construction methods.

As a result of this push, contractors are turning to bamboo and cork as hardwood alternatives. Bamboo is dimensionally more stable and more durable than many types of hardwood flooring. It also has a long life cycle when properly maintained, far outlasting the time needed for new bamboo to be grown and harvested to produce additional flooring. Cork is made with natural, renewable raw materials, and is biodegrad-



The EPA recently special ordered Teragren's bamboo flooring.

able. Traditional hardwood is also biodegradable. Some contractors will only use wood that is certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which covers woods that have been harvested by well-managed forests. (FSC is the only organization recognized by the U.S. Green Building Council).

Dallas-based East Teak, which earned FSC certification for its products, is supplying post-consumer recycled teak and rosewood that comes from 100-percent recycled wood. "We saw the need to offer architects, contractors and designers a product that met the demands of their clients," said Wayne Rogers, president of East Teak, which has operations in Washington state and South Carolina.

Rogers said the company is expanding its product line in 2007 "to meet the demands for eco-friendly wood species and also to provide the building industry with top quality woods that are sustainable and unique in design." **FCW**

► **Robina Floors** has signed two new distributors, Shoreline Flooring Supplies and David Young Distributing, to carry its product line. Shoreline has carried flooring supplies since 1970 and is now adding its first wood line. The company is unique in that it consists of five distinct and autonomous divisions covering Florida, Robina Floors signed with the Hollywood, Orlando and Gulf Coast divisions for a combined 23 branches.

"Shoreline is committed to growing the Robina line, which is the first branded wood collection in the company's history," said Mark Suplee, regional sales manager.

David Young Distributing in Texas is 5 years old. "David's company is a great fit for us," said Ron Oliver, regional sales manager, Robina Floors. "Robina creates true value for the end consumer, which is something many manufacturers are losing sight of in today's market," said owner David Young.

► **Tembec Inc.** said it will shut down its Kirkland Lake, Ontario-based engineered wood products mill for at least two

months to cut inventories. The company said the move took effect May 21 and will affect 35 workers. The mill's status will be reviewed in early July based on prevailing market conditions, Tembec said. The Kirkland Lake mill produces finger-jointed lumber used in construction. Tembec cited the extremely challenging lumber market for the temporary mill closure. "Demand for lumber is down sharply, driven primarily by the dramatic decline in the level of housing starts in the United States," said Dennis Rounsaville, president of Tembec's forest products group. "This decline in demand has resulted in both lower prices for lumber and reduced operating rates in sawmills across Eastern Canada."

Tembec is a diversified and integrated forest products company with operations in North America and France.

► **Weyerhaeuser OSB Wawa** announced that it will be curtailing operations back to a five-day work week. The mill will operate 24 hours a day for five days, and then it will shut down for two days. The production reduction will result in a

loss of jobs — both in production and management. Because the downturn in the markets is expected to be a long-term situation, the affected personnel will have their jobs terminated rather than be laid off.

► **EcoTimber's** line of prefinished, handscraped hardwood flooring has been awarded the Green Building Pages' 2007 Sustainable Products Earth Day Award. 100 percent of the wood in EcoTimber's handscraped flooring is certified according to the rules of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), adhering to strict environmental and social standards. The engineered flooring's wood layers are glued together with non-formaldehyde adhesives, protecting indoor air quality and exceeding the new state of California formaldehyde standard two years before it goes into effect.

"EcoTimber has always had the highest environmental standards," said EcoTimber CEO Lewis Buchner. "Here's a prefinished floor that is genuinely handscraped, made in the USA from FSC-certified forests with formaldehyde-free adhesives. This is as 'eco' as it gets."

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