

Healthcare, education growing; green holds strong

By Emily Hooper

The general state of affairs in the commercial resilient segment is not far off from most categories. Most manufacturers interviewed by FCNews reported less than remarkable growth for the start of the year but were pleased to no longer see major losses in market share.

"The commercial market will continue to struggle as budget deficits in both the public and private sector hamper recovery efforts on a broad scale," reported Edward Braulick, senior marketing manager at CBC Flooring. A significant reduction in tax revenues particularly hurt the retail and education markets by delaying remodeling and construction projects. "Some of these projects had been on hold since early 2009 and are now getting the funding to proceed."

Executives at Armstrong followed suit, highlighting particu-

larly challenging areas. "The weakest market right now is retail," said Dominic Rice, vice president, Commercial Resilient. "Retail will depend more so on the direction of the economy and new homes sales; as more houses are built there will

this practice will change as the economy lifts.

What is going where

As in residential trends, LVT is a hot commodity in the commercial segment. The product's design capabilities and strong performance attributes have extended uses beyond traditional retail applications.

"LVT is making its way into all major channels due to its styling flexibility and high performance," said Zach Zehner, Commercial Resilient manager for Mannington. "We are seeing the growth of demand for LVT product in projects in multiple arenas—healthcare, higher education, Main Street, military housing and multi-family."

Centiva reported similar findings. "LVT continues to be used in all commercial market segments; retail, hospitality, corporate with growth in education and healthcare environments," said Leigh Wright,

senior designer. She attributed its popularity to maintenance-friendly attributes, high durability as well as realistic and sophisticated design.

While LVT is creeping into healthcare, bio-friendly flooring has made a mark in the segment. Armstrong introduced Migrations bio-based flooring tile made with Biostride, a patent-pending polymer made from rapidly renewable materials. Its construction reduces reliance on petroleum and fossil fuels and contributes to LEED credits. "Migrations composition tile format greatly expands the availability and affordability of bio-based technology to the largest product category in the hard surface commercial flooring market," Rice said. "All this at an affordable price point with great performance."

Mannington's healthcare-specific flooring was also touted as gaining market share. "Our new BioSpec MD homogeneous resilient sheet continues to rise because it is bringing new function and form to a workhorse product," Zehner said. "In addition to excellent performance, it also has a UV cured wearlayer with an antimicrobial agent." In the fall, he expects to update the color palette on what the mill claims is the only homogeneous sheet flooring made in the U.S.

Homogeneous sheet flooring is also selling well for Armstrong. "[It] is used where the most durable kind of vinyl is needed—healthcare operating rooms where they have heavy equipment, in corridors and patient rooms," Rice stated. "Healthcare is the primary segment for sheet vinyl."

Green hasn't lost any momentum either, as designers and specifiers request eco-friendly products regularly.

"Despite the funding challenges for projects, we do not see any deterioration of sustainable building practices," Braulick reported. "We believe it will continue to become more important and gain in share of total construction starts."

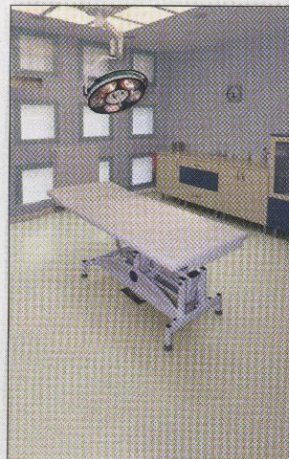
Forbo's Casey Johnson, national sales manager, reported green products are selling for the company. "Without question Marmoleum composition tile, a certified sustainable floor, has continued to help drive our overall business."

Rice emphasized the trend as more than just a fad. "The environmental consideration of a product is here to stay. Bio-based tile continues to grow [because it is a] great, economical, green



Forbo's Flotex has found applications in assisted living facilities.

be a need for more stores." This will ring especially true for specialty flooring stores. As the economy struggled, store owners tightened their reigns but



The category's strength in healthcare can be partly attributed to Mannington's BioSpec MD homogeneous sheet flooring.

product for the customer.

Visuals are even leaning toward a preference for nature. "Products that represent traditional wood and stone types—cherry, oak and slate—are still widely used," Wright said. Resilient construction with mimicking visuals provide a cost-efficient alternative to the pricey, authentic alternatives.

Social responsibility is also of importance to consumers. Growing the economy and creating more jobs has led buyers to look for products that helped or sustained domestic jobs. "Interest in American-made products is also on the rise," Wright said.

Coming up at NeoCon

Despite a host of challenges facing commercial building and remodeling, positive perspectives prevailed for the contract trade show of the year. Wright reported solid leads from Globalshop and improved activity in the retail sector, creating excitement over the outcome of the upcoming market. "We have found over the last couple of years that even though a show's attendance may be down from the previous years, key decision makers are the ones who are attending."

Forbo also has high hopes for the show, with many new products and patterns to introduce in its core markets: healthcare, education and assisted living. "We continue to be cautiously optimistic for continued forward movement in commercial business," Johnson said.

Citing a tone of conservative optimism, CBC expects a moderate resurgence in attendance. "We anticipate the commercial market to remain very soft throughout this year, coming back somewhat in 2011," Braulick predicted.

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