

NeoCon: Strong start

By Kimberly Gavin

[CHICAGO] NeoCon 2010 opened to some trepidation on the part of the commercial community given that the downturn has hit this market pretty severely in the past year and a half. But exhibitors felt traffic on the opening day, June 14, was at least as good as last year. And business conditions are very slightly improved, some said. Last year, everyone saw doom and gloom. This year things are a little brighter.

By the end of day two, the word was still positive. "We were very pleased with traffic over both days," said Natalie Jones, vice president of commercial brand development and creative product for Mannington Commercial. Even more important, Jones and other exhibitors said, was that designers were coming with projects in hand. "They are requesting samples," she said. "Business is picking back up."

Merchandise Mart Properties (MMPI) reported pre-show that pre-registration was up 15 percent over last year. Seminar registration was up 100 percent.

Another interesting trend in traffic was the increase in visitors from outside the U.S. "I've heard a lot more foreign languages here," noted Russell Pike, vice president, global commercial and automotive surfaces for Invista. Pike and others saw a rise in attendees from Mexico and South America.

"Monday (day one) is an important day," said Bobby Berrier, senior vice president of product management for The Mohawk Group. "We saw steady traffic in the morning and the afternoon. I would say it's incrementally up over last year."

Randy Weis, president and CEO, RD Weis Co. and Starnet member, said, "It's good to see manufacturers coming out with so many new products. And that they remain committed to sustainability. Overall, the vibe is good. It feels better than last year."

Business on the contract side is a "mixed bag," said Glenn Hussman, CEO, Tandus. "It's maybe a little better than last year," he said. The corporate market is a little stronger than anyone thought it would be. The school market is harder hit than might have been anticipated. "School budgets are tight," Hussman said, particularly in some areas.

"I am pleasantly surprised with the commercial market," said Tyrone Johnson, president, Amtico, North America. "Everything you read says things should be slow,

but we are seeing some things coming back. We are up in our plans. We are planning for future growth."

NeoCon is always about seeing the latest innovations and new products in the commercial arena, as well as identifying trends in this style-driven market. Some notable trends include:

- More focus on modularity in flooring. Resilient flooring suppliers are taking a page from modular carpet and embracing the modularity of the product.
- New shapes in modular carpet with the launch of Shaw's 18 × 36 collection, which allows designers to elongate space as well as play with new installation methods.
- Digital printing is becoming more of a factor in ceramic tile, resilient and even carpet with Milliken's new proprietary high-definition digital printing process seen in the Notan Collection and others.
- Customers continue to demand value-engineered products, but they are also asking for more custom options like custom accent colors in otherwise neutral grounds.

FCW will have more on NeoCon 2010 in the July 5/12 issue and online at fcw1.com. **FCW**

