



WFCA Gold Standard

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Virginia dealer cites teamwork, education, dedication to

By Matthew Spieler

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA—Standing out and being among the best is a given for success, but when you do business in a community recently ranked the best place to live in the United States, you truly need to do be the best there is. So is the case for Carpet Plus, a single store operation owned by Duane Cassis and his wife, Cindy Adams. Their dedication to being the best flooring store possible earned them the Gold Standard Award for excellence in retailing from the World Floor Covering Association (WFCA).

WFCA established the award last year to annually recognize one of its members for doing business in an exemplary fashion, and sets a gold standard for other flooring retailers to emulate. Ike Gulesserian of San Leandro, Calif., was the winner of the first Gold Standard Retailer award.

“Carpet Plus stood out for a number of reasons—from the way they answer their phones to their post-sale follow-up rituals,” said Chris Davis, WFCA’s president and CEO. “It was apparent to all the judges Carpet Plus has a relentless focus on serving its customers and making sure they receive the highest quality products and services.”

While “a lot has changed” since Cassis opened the business with one installer working out of a storage space 23 years ago, one thing has not: “We have always strived to offer the best possible service to our customers. We simply try to treat everyone the way that we would like to be treated.”

In addition, Cassis and his staff, which now numbers nine plus his wife, and “a very select group of sub-contractors as our other installation crews,” recognize the type of business they operate. “We are helping people with their homes. It’s very personal to them and we try not to forget that. We work with each individual to understand their needs and then guide them through the design process. Our salespeople have installation experience and that really helps when finding the right product and making sure it’s installed in the right manner.”

Davis added, “At Carpet Plus they believe salespeople don’t sell products. Rather, their prime consideration is to work with the customer to understand

her needs and guide her through the design process.”

This process is not just what helped Carpet Plus win the Gold Standard, “Our customers have repeatedly expressed their appreciation to our salespeople for their no-pressure approach,” Cassis explained.

No-pressure is not the same as non-professional. If anything, when it comes to Carpet Plus, this philosophy of taking an individual approach to each sale translates into an ultra professional operation.



WFCA’s Chris Davis, right, presented Duane Cassis and his wife, Cindy Adams, with the association’s Gold Standard award during the opening general session at this year’s Surfaces.

“There is a strong emphasis on professionalism,” Davis said, “meaning the staff is highly trained and up-to-date on products, benefits and features.”

Always learning

“We strongly believe in continuing education,” Cassis pointed out. “We are never done learning. Products and methods are constantly evolving and we consider it a part of our job to keep on top of all the latest innovations in the industry.”

In addition, “We work as a team, always consulting each other on new ideas and problem solving. Having long-term employees allows us to build long-lasting trust with our customers. They continue to come to the people they know for their flooring needs.”

Having an educated sales staff is one thing, but Carpet Plus takes it all the way through the sales process to its installers. In fact, for Cassis, there is no compromise when it comes to this.

“It doesn’t matter if they are subs or hourly guys,” he said, “all installers used by Carpet Plus are certified by the International Certified Floorcovering Installers Association (CFI) in their field. It is a requirement to work with us. Carpet Plus will even pay for that training. By using quality installers we ensure that our customers are receiving the best

installation possible.”

Why does Cassis feel this way? “Because CFI whole-heartedly supports the elevation of our industry as a whole. It promotes change through education, honesty and strong work ethics. It doesn’t just promote it. It facilitates it with constant communication, seminars and various certification programs. CFI trainers have been to our store several times and [they] were the first to congratulate us on our Gold Standard Award.

“I contribute a portion of our success to our becoming a part of CFI and WFCA,” he added. “I find it hard to believe all retailers do not take advantage of all that these two organizations have to offer.”

Along with hosting CFI classes at the store, Carpet Plus opens itself up to manufacturer’s training classes—“for our installers and our sales team—to make sure we are providing the best possible products and service to our customers.”

Speaking of products, everything in Carpet Plus is hand picked by Cassis and Adams. “If it’s in our showroom, we totally believe in that product,” he said. “If we find problems with a certain product, we do not display it. We owe that to our customers but it also cuts down on post-installation problems.”

First impression

This attention to quality and detail starts from the moment consumers walk into the 4,000 square foot showroom. Davis noted, the store is “designed for the customers’ enjoyment and it’s obvious [Duane and Cindy] take great pride in its appearance.”

“I believe in keeping our store neat and clean and clutter-free,” Cassis said. It’s important to keep the store organized and samples put in place. That goes a long way in making that first impression

when people walk into the showroom.”

Being neat doesn’t mean having a sterile environment. “We also want our showroom to be attractive and comfortable,” he added, “so we display products in different areas of the showroom in an effort to create a scene that you may find in your home.”

For example, one area is set with an eclectic dining table and wicker chairs on a leather area rug set into a cork floor. “We receive so many compliments on our showroom’s appearance” Cassis explained, “it really motivates us to constantly try to improve it. Next time they come in, we want to ‘wow’ them again.”

One other aspect to the store that not only makes it a comforting experience for customers but adds to its professional and caring philosophy is the dedicated 10 x 12-foot children’s area. “It’s in a pretty centralized area so parents can walk around and shop but still keep an eye on the kids,” Cassis noted. The inviting space offers coloring sheets, crayons and a looping video showing how carpet can be recycled to help keep the little ones entertained. “Both the kids and parents love it.”

Green citizens

The fact Carpet Plus has a video showing carpet recycling to the children is no accident. Charlottesville may be a relatively small community—approximate population of 41,000 with about 200,000 in the metropolitan statistical area—but Cassis said it is “fairly progressive in certain areas, such as the green movement.

“Our promotion of green products has been highly effective



Teamwork. At a recent home show, Carpet Plus partnered with Mohawk to bring in nationally recognized decorator/handyman Chip Wade, center, to its booth. With Wade are, from left, Liz Eure of Carpet Plus, Darla Rovniak of Mohawk, and Cindy Adams and Duane Cassis, co-owners of Carpet Plus.

in drawing eco-conscious consumers to our store,” he explained. “People come just to investigate the environmentally friendly flooring options. Over the past few years we have established ourselves as a leader in the green movement by placing a strong emphasis on all eco-friendly products and practices. We recently added an element to our website (carpetplusonline.com/eco)—Nature’s Ingredients—with images from nature, each with an explanation of how each one is related to our various green products.”

Carpet Plus is also a dedicated member of the Charlottesville Green Building Committee and devotes time and energy to more than just selling green products and supporting green programs within the community. It actually initiates them.

An example is operating the only official cork recycling program in the area—Re-Cork C’Ville (www.recorkcville.com). In what began as a simple quest to collect wine corks for a small project focusing on cork flooring, the company “stumbled across some disturbing information” about used corks: Of the almost 15 billion sold each year, the majority end up in landfills.

“Considering the large presence of both wine and sustainability in the area,” Cassis said, “we were shocked that a cork recycling program hadn’t already been established. We figured we had the resources within the company to start such a program, so why not do it ourselves?”

The concept is simple: local vineyards, restaurants and wine shops agree to display a custom-made collection box in their establishment—free of charge—and watch it fill up with both their own corks and that of local wine-drinkers. The boxes are emptied on a periodic basis and the collected corks are sent to a facility to be recycled.

“We want people to know that even if they drink a bottle per week or per month,” he



As part of Carpet Plus’ cork recycling program, the company filled a Mini Cooper with used wine stoppers. The person who guesses the closest to the number of cork stoppers in the car wins a new iPad.





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customers, community for success

explained, “as long as their natural corks aren’t going in the trash, they’re making a difference—and we’re making it easy for people to do their part in helping the environment.”

As of press time, Carpet Plus has signed up over 40 locations and has collected more than 40,000 cork stoppers.

Corporate citizens

Along with being green citizens, Carpet Plus takes an active role in the community. “They are excellent corporate citizens,” Davis said, “and are active through their local homebuilders association, Habitat for Humanity, the local SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) and SARA (Sexual Assault Resource Agency). Carpet Plus is the main sponsor of the local home show, and it also regularly hosts events for the chamber of commerce and the local design and architecture community.”

Being good corporate citizens is part of the reason why Carpet Plus has been able to not only build a loyal clientele but continually expand its customer base.

For example, at this year’s home show, which took place last month, Carpet Plus was able to secure an appearance by popular TV designer, Chip Wade through its relationship with Mohawk, as Wade is the mill’s official “handyman.”

Along with hosting the home decorating celebrity, “We worked hard to make sure every person walking through the door remembers Carpet Plus,” he added, such as having its name and logo displayed on the digital ribbon banner encircling the arena.

Taking its green message to the show, Carpet Plus handed out eco-friendly, re-usable bags and when visitors first walked in they saw a Carpet Plus Mini Cooper filled with cork wine stoppers—in an effort to promote eco-friendly cork flooring. “Last year we filled it with empty plastic bottles to promote Mohawk’s EverStrand carpet,” Cassis said. Whoever guessed closest to the number of cork stoppers in the car won a new iPad.

In terms of opening up its store to the community, Carpet Plus recently hosted an event introducing local architecture and building professionals to Torlys’ new leather flooring—“we are the only dealer in the state,” he noted. And, in December it hosted the Blue Ridge Homebuilders Association holiday party, which welcomed close to 100 members of the

area’s building community to the store. “It’s always of benefit to get new people into the store. They may not need flooring right now but one day they will and they will remember Carpet Plus.”

Building long-term relationships—with customers and employees—is one of the keys Cassis attributes to the company’s overall success. “Having long-term employees allows us to build long-lasting trust with our customers. They continue to come to the people they know for their flooring needs.”

That is why Cassis is quick to

emphasize he and his wife were not the ones who won WFCA’s Gold Standard award. “Carpet Plus the store—the team—won this award. There are many parts to the whole, and our employees have each contributed in their specialized way. I contribute our success and our independence to our ability to grow and change. Sometimes it’s scary to try new products or new methods but to keep yourself fresh and current, you just have to do it. And, if something isn’t working, you had better fix it before the choice is no longer yours.”

In winning, Carpet Plus received a \$5,000 check, a Gold Standard trophy, acknowledgement on the WFCA website and a customized WFCA Gold Standard seal for its store entrance.

“We are truly honored to have received this award,” he concluded. “We have always strived to offer the best possible service to our customers and it feels great



The Carpet Plus store in Charlottesville, Va., takes pride in being neat, clean and orderly throughout the 4,000 square feet of selling space.

to be recognized for it. Of course, we will still continue to try to outdo ourselves in the future.”

Green products. Green future.

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