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Spring 2022

CONNECTION

TRENDS:
People seek
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ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

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- Keeping our employees fit
- Many gather for KBIS

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ATLANTA!**



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ON THE COVER:

This National Kitchen and Bath Association award winner illustrates a couple of trends in bathrooms. White is still the number one choice for surfaces in both baths and kitchens; but today, it's often paired with contrasting black and gold. Also, one of the most-often used touches to soften the contrast and add a bit of nature is greenery. The picture on the cover won an award in the traditional small bath category. WW Design Studio, Photo: Florios Demosten.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Time to refresh



Spring is always a time of renewal, when winter's blahs and cold give way to growth and new beginnings. This spring we say goodbye (and good riddance) to another winter of worrying about COVID, distribution woes and bad weather. Those three worries are still with us as well as new woes over what's happening

in the world, but unlike last year when so much was bleak, this year we notice an air of optimism and freshness we haven't seen in a while.

The optimism seemed to be in plentiful supply at the recent Kitchen and Bath Industry Show (KBIS, see story on page 17). But ICPA also has its own event approaching: The Buzz in Atlanta, GA, April 29 and 30. The Buzz provides a new channel for connecting and a way to recharge our batteries. I can't tell you how much I look forward to meeting with everyone, and we're planning some terrific breakout sessions that will help to stimulate our conversations and our ideas. If POLYCON 21 was any indication, we are all very much ready to say goodbye to zoom-only meetings and hello to face-to-face interaction. So far the enthusiasm has been outstanding, and I hope any of you that haven't already registered will join us in this celebration. I promise it will be well worth your trip.

This issue of your magazine is devoted to kitchen and bath design trends for 2022 and beyond. Executive Editor Genilee Swope Parente has been tracking what's happening for many months, and she reports what she learned in a special feature. For example, studies and the recent KBIS reveal that trends that began because of the increased time we spend in our homes are sticking around and that design today is increasingly influenced

by the younger generations.

Speaking of younger generations, one of our newest board members is Derek Hill, sales manager of Syn-Mar. Derek is a third-generation employee of the company, which was started by his grandfather and grandmother, Richard and Mary Patricia Hill, and is currently run by his father, Tim Hill. The company has been around for more than four decades, growing in a smart way to become a major player in New England. We thought it was a good time to profile this long-time ICPA member company.

Another spring-time development for many people is a commitment to health and fitness. The magazine talked to two ICPA member companies who have programs that encourage their employees to exercise and pay attention to their health. Such programs are an excellent way to add to the value we can provide our employees.

Lastly, our hearts go out to the family of Richard Higgins, who passed away in January, and to the employees of the company he helped build: HK Research. He was truly a leader in this industry, and we will miss his wisdom.

Hopefully, I'll see many of you in Atlanta and then again, this fall as we gather for POLYCON 22 Ohio. ■

ReBecca Erdmann
ICPA President
Co-owner, Sand & Swirl

THIS SPRING WE SAY GOODBYE (AND GOOD RIDDANCE) TO ANOTHER WINTER OF WORRYING...UNLIKE LAST YEAR WHEN SO MUCH WAS BLEAK, THIS YEAR WE NOTICE AN AIR OF OPTIMISM AND FRESHNESS WE HAVEN'T SEEN IN A WHILE.





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BY GENILEE SWOPE
PARENTE

SYN-MAR PRODUCTS, ELLINGTON, CT IS AN EXAMPLE OF A COMPANY THAT STARTED AS A SEEDLING

planted in 1977 by founders Richard and Mary Patricia Hill and grew over the next 44 years to become a thriving tree.

A major reason why that tree has done so well is that it's been watered and fed not only by its original founders, but by the next two generations of family members. A second reason is that, along the way, the company and its leaders have been flexible in how they face the challenges of the business, willing to try different approaches as the industry has changed and willing to learn not just how to make quality surfaces products, but how to run an efficient manufacturing operation.

From start-up to major player

In the 1970s, Richard Hill was working as a traveling salesman—determined to get out of that business and start his own company. He went to a trade show and learned about the cultured marble business.



Centrally located in Connecticut, Syn-Mar is strategically positioned to service the Northeast.

Syn-Mar: Three generations of growing the smart way

“My father loved working with his hands, and the idea of manufacturing these products was very appealing to him,” says Richard’s son Tim Hill, who currently runs the company.

Richard and Pat opened the business as the sole employees operating out of a 2,000-square-foot building. As their business grew, so did the family and by the time sons Andy, Tim, Rick and Ken were in high school, the kids were getting involved by working after school and on weekends. Tim took business classes at a local community college, determined to help the business grow the right way. Ken remained active in the company for many years, most recently as director of sales and marketing. Tim says Ken played a “huge role in getting the company into the strategic position it is today.”

By the turn of the century, Richard was ready to retire and hand over the business to Tim, who had become a partner.

“At the time, we were located in about 6,000 square feet of rental space. We grew to 10,000 square feet within a few years,” Tim explains.

In 2006, the company built its existing 15,000-square-foot facility. At that point, Syn-Mar was primarily making vanity tops with a small part of the business making showers for the new construction industry. The company sold its products through various channels including the retail market.

Since then, Syn-Mar has expanded to become a business that operates exclusively through distribution to plumbing supply houses and kitchen and bath stores located within a wide swath of the New England area. It has transformed into a manufacturer that makes significantly more showers, which have become the main focal point of the business.

“We are transitioning into being strictly a manufacturer and leaving the showroom sales, design work and installation up to our dealers,” Tim explains.

Third generation Derek Hill, who is currently sales manager and is working towards taking over the helm someday,

explains that “The reason for this change in business model is to expand our distribution area. Currently, we have strong roots in New England. We are expanding our business to New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.”

Current and future markets

About 80% of Syn-Mar’s products are made for distribution into the residential market with the remaining going into commercial construction. The most popular products today, according to both Tim and Derek, are grout-free shower wall systems and custom shower bases. The company also makes customized countertop surfaces, shower wall kit systems and vanity tops.

Instead of expending resources on major technology, Syn-Mar has focused on process improvements “that result in big advancements when multiplied over all aspects of the business,” Tim explains. For example, the company created a resin-dispensing system that allows it to pump resin out of the resin room through the wall directly onto scales to weigh and add to batches. Another example is a pneumatic wheel dolly that takes stored shower bases to and from locations in the plant.

The most popular pick for a color is Venus, a white marble with a gray swirl, but the company offers a wide variety of choices and is looking to expand those choices by offering products such as the Tyvarian line of grout-free panels.

As it expands its geographic reach and product variety, the company is also growing its manufacturing footprint.

“We have plans to add another 15,000 square feet to our facility by 2025,” says Tim. “This will allow us to expand our manufacturing capacity and allow us more room to store finished product and inventory items.”

That last goal is another example of how the company



Syn-Mar’s Aurelius is featured in a dealer showroom in Concord, NH.



A dolly the company created helps move shower bases from area to area.

has learned to expand the right way.

“We have been putting more focus on stocking items for resale because, in today’s Amazon-driven world, everybody has grown to expect quick shipping,” Derek explains. “We believe that stocking select items will help us reduce lead times and provide more value to customers.”

The company currently has about 20 employees including four office staff, two drivers and 14 people who work in the plant. It also has a showroom that allows walk-ins and provides a place for distributors to send customers to check out colors and full-size displays.

The company “highly encourages and incentivizes our dealers to display Syn-Mar in their showrooms,” Tim says, and uses its website as a major way to get the Syn-Mar name and contact information out to potential customers while providing a place to showcase photography of the product itself.

The third generation

Derek Hill, like his father, became involved in the Syn-Mar business early in life, doing random odds and ends in the plant as a child.

“The summer before my sixteenth birthday, I finally had to grow up and get a real summer job and that’s when I really



Syn-Mar plans to double its plant size by 2025.

started working at Syn-Mar,” he says. To learn the business, he worked in different aspects of production throughout high school and into his college years when he was on break.

He attended Plymouth State University in New Hampshire specifically because it had a specialized degree that focused on small business and entrepreneurship.

In college, he was introduced to a professional selling skills program. “That’s when I realized one thing Syn-Mar lacked was an outside sales representative for the northern New England territory,” he said. When he graduated in 2018, that position was created with Derek filling the slot. He traveled all over the area from Bangor, ME to Concord, NH; Burlington, VT to Boston and Cape Cod; “and everywhere in between,” he says.

He currently has no ownership in the business—Tim is the sole owner. However, “I do have intentions of taking over the business from him one day and continuing to grow and expand the Syn-Mar legacy,” he says.

Meanwhile, he’s learning the ins and outs of working in a family business.

“The biggest challenge for me has been the ‘we have always done it this way’ attitude,” from current employees, some of whom have more years at the company than Derek.

What he’s learned to do is listen, learn and “lead by example, not just assume seniority because you’re in the family. You have to earn the respect of the other employees,” he says.

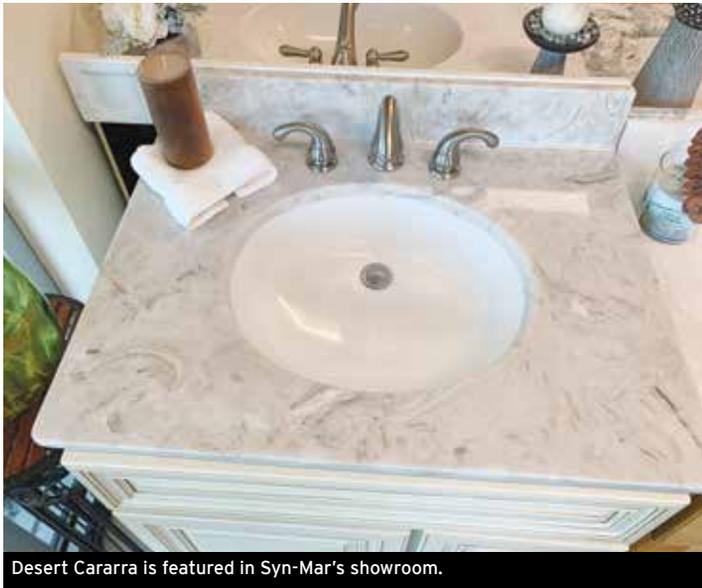
Working in a family company also involves the challenge



Syn-Mar currently has a plant staff of 14. Pictured from left are Josh Gionfriddo and Tom Kennedy in the pouring department.



(From left) Trevor Johnson and Niko Constantopoulos fine-tune custom pieces in the finishing department.



Desert Cararra is featured in Syn-Mar's showroom.

 "Syn-Mar has focused on process improvements that result in big advancements..."

of not bringing home the business every day.

"We try to avoid talking about work at the dinner table or family functions. What you learn is sometimes you just have to shut off work and talk about other subjects that don't involve the factory," Derek explains.

The Hill family has been involved in ICPA for a long time. Tim has served as president of ICPA and has been active for

many years while Derek is currently a board member.

Tim explains that "the friends I have met over the years and the comradery created is extremely valuable to all of us. Members of this association are always eager to help one another out and answer any questions as they arise."

Derek says his father's experience as an active member influenced his decision to become involved. He adds, "My hope is that, like my father, I will develop many relationships that will help our company. Being part of an association is an excellent way to grow my knowledge base and learn about other manufacturers as well best practices in the industry." ■

GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. She welcomes ideas on other companies to profile. Send them to gsparente@verizon.net.

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Color is increasingly part of kitchens and bathrooms. NKBA award winner: large traditional bathroom. D'Amore Interiors, Photo: Tim Gormley.

DESIGN TRENDS

in 2022 and beyond

BY GENILEE SWOPE
PARENTE

AS 2021 MORPHED INTO 2022, PEOPLE IN THE DESIGN INDUSTRY BEGAN LOOKING AT UPCOMING TRENDS. Much of the world expected the effects that COVID-19 brought to the building industry a year ago would slow down by the time 2022 arrived, but the resurgence of different strains quashed those expectations, and some of the trends are now looking to be long-term developments. For example, in the home building and remodeling industries, the demand for more flexible space within the home, for ways to have more sanitary surfaces and for ways to add comfort and warmth to home environments continue to grow. Meanwhile, some ongoing developments in the world, such as the increase in business coming from the Millennial generation, are making headlines among those who track what's happening.

Cast Polymer Connection started collecting articles, blogs and reports on trends last fall. What the magazine is seeing is:

The Millennials

The National Kitchen and Bath Association puts out a general design trends study late in the fall that looks at 2022 and beyond. One of the main points this year's report focused upon is that business from boomers is decreasing while Millennial clients' influence is increasing and Generation X is staying consistent. Gen-X now commands 82% of designers' business, surpassing boomers, who make up 81%. The number of projects for boomers is down 7% from 2020 while Gen-X demand is about the same.

Meanwhile, Millennial business has grown. Millennials with kids now make up 59% of the business (compared to 51% last year) and millennials without kids make up 48% (compared to 42% last year). That's a 10% increase in projects over 2020.

In the kitchen, Millennial tastes are transferring to the demand for spaces that serve multiple purposes or can be converted from one use to another as a family changes, for touchless features and easy-to-clean surfaces and for more outdoor living areas, the NKBA design trends study found. In the bathroom, millennials want large showers and will often remove a tub for that purpose. Popular now in both rooms are products that make use of today's technologies such as connected products that control water temperature, kitchen appliances or communications.

NKBA's design study also revealed that:

- All generations are asking for countertops that are sanitary and nonporous, and the demand for quartz is 'expected to continue.'
- Larger format tiles and slabs with less grout are desirable. The study said that in showers, more materials with a groutless look at a mid-to-lower price point and the less expensive trimmable tall panel options for walls are in increasing demand.
- Curb-less showers are being sought as part of the trend in today's spaces to ease aging in place. Homeowners are also asking for fewer free-standing tubs and fewer seats in showers.
- Emerging kitchen design trends for the next three years include technology for customizable solutions (sought by 51% of homeowners) and design inspired by nature (45%) and European design trends (36%). New kitchen designs also are moving away from white and adding more color (especially in cabinets and backsplashes), wood grain visibility and clean natural styles. The report also found that customers are liking textured laminates, which are easy to care for and less expensive than wood.
- As far as countertop materials, quartz in the kitchen and bath are most popular at 80% for both rooms (up from 78% in the kitchen in 2021 and 74% in the bath for that year). Quartzite

is next at 31% in the kitchen and 30% in the bath. Meanwhile, granite continues to fall (from 24% in 2021 to 19% in 2022 in the kitchen and falling from 19% in 2021 in baths to 15% in 2022).

- Emerging bathroom trends for the next three years include an increased design influence from hotels and travel influences (55%), from nature (38%) and from Europe (30%). People also indicate they want less glass in showers and larger shower sizes (the desire for two-person showers has grown to 88% from 83% a year ago.)

Priority for countertops

Houzz releases a kitchen trends study at the beginning of each year and a bathroom trends study at the end of a year. The 2022 report for kitchens pointed out that homeowners seemed to be placing emphasis on countertops—more than 9 in ten (91%) of kitchen renovations included countertops—a rise of three percentage points over last year. Houzz reported that engineered quartz is the most popular material at 52% while granite is second at 24%. Also, more than 35% of people who had planned to spend on countertops decided to spend significantly more on countertops than originally planned.

As far as countertop colors, white continues to be the most popular, growing to 39% in 2022 from 31% two years ago. Meanwhile, grays and blacks have lost some ground over that period.

Another major trend highlighted this year is a continued upward climb in the amount of money people are spending. The Houzz study reported that the median spend for major



The layered look, where multiple colors and textures are used in the room, has become a top choice. NKBA award winner: small traditional kitchen. PURE Design Inc., Photo: Janis Nicolay.



Islands are getting longer and becoming central to the functionality of the kitchen. NKBA award winner: large traditional kitchen. Decori Kitchens, Photo: Adam Kane Macchia.

kitchen remodels had increased by 14% (to \$40,000) and by 25% (to \$10,000) for minor renovations over the year. Larger kitchen remodels also climbed upwards in spending (from \$45,000 last year to \$50,000 this year) as did spending on major remodeling for a smaller kitchen (from \$30,000 last year to \$35,000).

The 2022 kitchen report pointed out that people increasingly seemed able to afford to remodel. Among events triggering kitchen renovations, “wanted to do it all along and finally have the means” has grown from 37% in 2020 to 40% in 2021 and 45% in 2022.

Renovating homeowners also are seeking larger overall sizes in kitchens. More than half (54%) of upgraded kitchens now measure 200 square feet or more, up by three percentage points over last year.) Also getting bigger are kitchen

islands. Nearly 2 in 5 islands are now more than 7 feet long, an increase of five percentage points for the year.

Overall, the transitional style in kitchens has gained ground (from 21% in 2020 and 2021 to 25% for the 2022 study). Losing ground are traditional and farmhouse styles over the same period.

“Another major trend...is the upward climb in the amount of money people are spending.”

In the bathroom, Houzz reported in 2021 that rest and relaxation are the top goals of what homeowners want out of renovations (41%, which is the same as last year’s report). For 2021, Houzz’s bathroom report showed that the top features that homeowners seek to help in that goal are cleanliness (68%) and lack of clutter (63%). Greenery is also something homeowners increasingly want. Nearly a third (32%) of homeowners added greenery to their bathrooms during renovations.

What designers are saying

Besides the NKBA and Houzz studies, many of the nation’s designers predicted that 2022 and the next few years will see changes made stronger by the pandemic and how it changed the way people look at their homes. The same was true last year, but designers this year focused on the reality that some of those changes may stick around for a while.

For example, one of the most recognized trends discussed



Wood and rustic touches are popular in today’s design. NKBA award winner: small traditional bath. Christine Spillar Interior Design, LLC., Photo: Libbie Martin.



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Although neutral colors still rule the roost (left), spots of color more frequently show up in design (right). Particularly popular are blues and greens. Another trend that has caught and held is curbless showers (left). Photos: left, Mereway Kitchens & Bathrooms, Tirare shown in cashmere; right, Mereway Kitchens & Bathrooms, Knightsbridge in sky blue.

in 2020 and into 2021 was that, since people are spending more time in their houses, they want their homes to feel safer, more comfortable, more inviting and they are willing to invest in the special touches that will accomplish those goals. These investments are not a temporary fix but rather a change in taste and demand.

Several stories on design trends these past few months focused on the reality that people seem to care more today about designing around their personal needs than style.

In terms of comfort, for example, designers for kitchen and bath companies, furniture and furnishing companies report that:

Sharp edges and harsh lines are out; texture is in. Delta Faucet Company industrial designer AJ Tentler, for example, said in a recent article that people today want curves and softer lines to create a calmer environment. Another Delta faucet industrial designer, Maris Park Borris, added that because of the “sensory deprivation” brought about over the last few years, designers are adding texture to design elements such as on wallpaper, fixture finishes and surfaces.

Our bathrooms as spas. The trend toward making bathrooms feel like luxury spas is not new, but the pandemic has caused homeowners to redouble their efforts in this area, according to several designers. As the NKBA study revealed, people are looking at hotels and other luxury bathroom touches they’ve seen on travel as examples of how to move in that direction. Barrie Cutchie, design director for BC Design, explains in one article that bathrooms have become “inner sanctuaries” in our homes and people are now willing to spend money on very large bathtubs, double shower heads, walk-in wet rooms and double vanity units with luxury marble, granite or quartz countertops and

sunken under-mount sinks.

Biophilic design. Another trend that started a few years ago and is blossoming is incorporating nature into areas of buildings that need softening and warmth. According to Pinterest Predicts, an annual report published by social media giant Pinterest, this design development is about to be huge. Such design incorporates living plants and elements such as using natural wood for cabinets and accents to bring the outdoor into interiors. Some of this drive is coming from the acceptability that sustainable designs might be a better way to go. For example, many people believe that plants can purify the air, boost the mood and reduce stress so they are including them in their bathroom spa plans.

The biophilic design is also often discussed by those designing for the inside of commercial buildings and used for touches such as living walls of green plants, waterfalls and roof gardens.

Pinterest Predicts says biophilic architecture has grown 150% since 2019, not just in bathrooms, but in offices, bedrooms and other areas.

The layered look. While white remains a dominant force in designing rooms today, a new trend has emerged in creating layered looks. That means using softer, lighter paint colors throughout a room or for accent areas and mixing the softer look with different cabinet colors, raw wood tones and other touches. It often means the kitchen aisle colors and finishes are different than general kitchen surfaces and cabinetry, designers say. In the bathroom, it might mean accents in dramatic black or jewelry-like lighting fixtures. ■

GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. Send her your ideas on trends and developments in the industry at gsparente@verizon.net.



Designers are increasingly finding ways to bring nature inside to add relaxation to the mood. Photo: Acquabella Acquawhite.

Color our world “nature inspired”

For years **Cast Polymer Connection** has tracked what’s happening in the world of color and reported on selections for colors of the year from a few of the experts. However, in the last few years, a main trend occurring in this area is that the list of companies who choose to forecast has grown tremendously. While Pantone has been announcing its pick since 1999, in the last half-decade, multiple paint companies announced color choices, and in the last few years, those companies have been joined by online marketplaces, manufacturers of building products, design and home magazines, fabric makers and others.

This year, the colors most often selected were shades of green ranging from guacamole (Glidden paint company) to olive (PPG) and emerald green (Etsy) to eucalyptus green (Better Homes & Gardens, which picked its first color of the year in 2021 and is offering it through Wal-Mart products).

The reasoning behind green shades most often given is that the color reflects the trend towards nature-inspired design.

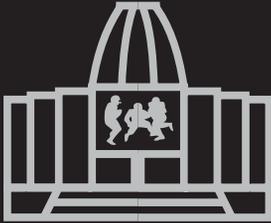
Meanwhile, the most famous color picker—Pantone Color Institute, created a new color just for the purpose of Color of the Year for the first time in 2022. Pantone, which named two colors last year (a bright yellow and a neutral gray shade) instead of the usual one, has always picked its color of the year from its own palette of possibilities. The new color created this year is Very Peri, a periwinkle the company described as “a daring curiosity that animates our creative spirit,” reflecting the “transformative times” following the last two years of worldwide changes.



“As we emerge from an intense period of isolation, our notions and standards are changing, and our physical and digital lives have merged in new ways,” the company said.

The color is called blue by people describing it, but it has undertones of violet-red that make it appear almost purple. Some of the other colors recently announced include:

- Spray paint brand Krylon picked a vibrant teal, which it says embodies “optimism, stability and balance.” Krylon claims the color draws inspiration from nature.
- Also crediting nature with inspiration was Dunn-Edwards paint company, which picked a soft, sophisticated brown that matches walnut tones. The company said the color is popular because it brings the “stability, comfort and calm” that the world seeks at present.
- Benjamin Moore named a soft, silvery green (October Mist), which is a botanical shade mimicking the pale green of flower stems.
- Sherwin-Williams’ color of the year is a mid-tone gray-green (Evergreen Fog) that the company calls a shift away from cool neutrals and brilliant jewel tones popular in the last few years.
- Valspar also picked nature-inspired hues, announcing an entire palette of warm neutrals, dusty pastels, and soothing blues and greens that it says “will not only help calm the nerves and boost the mood but also provide confidence in what the future may hold.” ■



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KBIS in 2022

No one knew exactly what to expect as tens of thousands of people converged on Orlando, FL for Construction Week, a combination of the International Builders Show and the Kitchen and Bath Industry Show (KBIS). Last year's attempt to take the event virtual faced difficulties, and technology blips canceled the exhibit. However, 2022 drew more than 70,000 people to Orlando, which didn't match 2019's historical 100,000 plus. But the show was proclaimed a success by those in charge. KBIS alone had 375 exhibitors, 85 of whom were first-timers, and the ratio of attendees to exhibitors was up 9% over the last in-person show (2020).

Most people agreed the mood of the show was optimistic.

"I would sum up the mood as: low expectations and fantastic results," said Paul A. Conover, president of Americas Region, The Engineered Stone Group, an ICPA member. "We had no idea what to expect for 2022, and leading up to the event, we learned of several cancellations of larger players. We also were facing a new COVID variant."

However, while general attendance was down "this was our best showing ever," he adds. "We secured more than a thousand leads, and we successfully launched a new brand (Acquabella) while securing solid leads on our private label (Marmite)," he said.

"There were a few empty spots in the exhibit hall," adds ICPA Executive Director Jennifer Towner. "But the slowdown in the number of people gave those who were there a better opportunity for one-on-one selling," she says.

ICPA had only a handful of members who attended the show, but they came back with an excited outlook and some great ideas.

"This was only my second KBIS, but I thought the show was pretty interesting," says Derek Hill, sales manager for Syn-Mar Products, Ellington, CT and an ICPA board member. He called the feel of the show "very positive. Everyone reported being busy over the past few years keeping up with the demands of the current market."

As far as what surface trends Hill saw, he noted "lots of striking earth tones such as brushed gold fixtures and bronze/rust-colored veins in neutral white background colors."

Nicole Hamilton, who runs ICPA member The Bath Collection with her husband Chad, said she noted that neutral colors and black/white combinations still rule the kitchen and bath industry. In the kitchen, "we saw



The Engineered Stone Group said it had its best show ever, launching a new brand and bringing in a thousand new leads.

engineered stone with invisible cooktops." In the bath "we loved seeing all the glass shower enclosures."

As far as the mood, "there was a lot of high energy and excitement to meet others in the industry" after several years of quiet, she said. "It made us excited for our next meet-up with ICPA members in Atlanta at The Buzz (see page 23)."

The experts report in

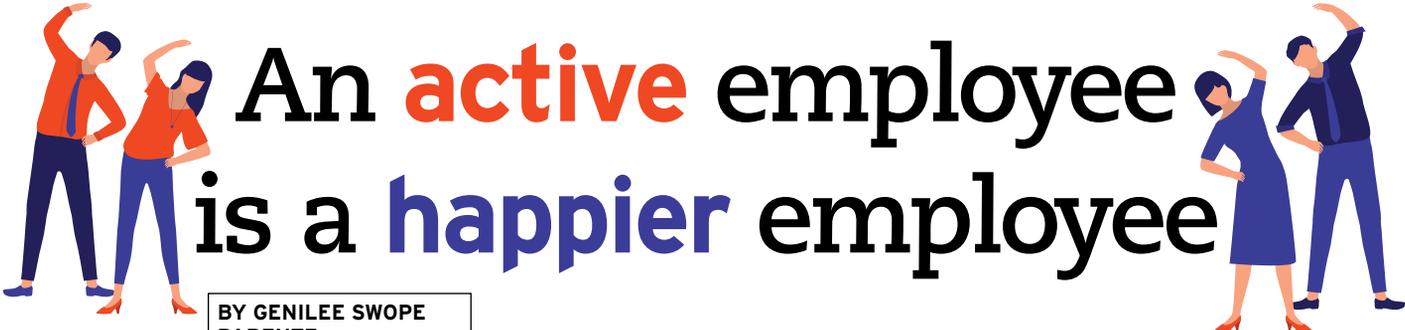
As far as what experts had to say at the show, one of the trends most often discussed was a reverse in the size of homes. During the National Association of Home Builders yearly press conference on what home buyers want, economists and experts pointed out the average size of a new home has grown back up to 2,524 square feet. That number peaked in 2015 at 2,689, but had declined steadily, flattening in 2020 to 2,486.

Quint said the big drivers for home design today are the bigger sizes, suburban locations and more outdoor living, as well as a desire for more rooms and modern, contemporary touches.

She said NAHB data show "younger buyers have been impacted by the pandemic more than older generations."

At the annual press conference on economic considerations, speakers pointed out that low inventory, supply-chain bottlenecks and Federal Reserve anti-inflation efforts are set to boost home prices. NAHB Chief Economist Robert Dietz pointed out that "Building material costs are up 21%" over last year, while builders are also dealing with persistent labor shortages.

NAHB says modest single-family construction growth will occur in 2022 with production at 26% higher than in 2019. Meanwhile, residential remodeling activity will increase 6% in 2022 and 10% in 2021 pushed along by the continuance of people in using homes for more purposes as well as a growth in home equity. ■



An active employee is a happier employee

BY GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE

ALMOST EVERYONE ACCEPTS THE REALITY that too many Americans are out of shape. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends adults get at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate-intensity cardio every week along with two strength training workouts. Yet fewer than half of adults meet those guidelines, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

At the same time, the benefits of exercise are well known and highly publicized. The American Heart Association reports a 19% lower risk of high blood pressure for people who are active, and the American Psychological Association, says just five minutes of physical activity can boost someone's mood, 30% of adults report feeling less stressed after exercise and 62% of adults who use activity to manage their stress levels say it's working.

For companies looking to create ways to keep employees satisfied and willing to stay on board, coming up with a way to encourage them to move and be aware of what they are doing to their own bodies can be an effective value-added benefit.

Here are two methods ICPA members are using to accomplish that goal.

Inpro: A wellness conscious company

Inpro Architectural Products has made physical fitness an integral part of benefits for its employees. The company has a committee whose purpose is to create ways to do this. It offers many programs and events such as fitness competitions among employees, exercise and nutrition classes, special events such as a detoxification week and other challenges and educational events. At its headquarters in Muskego, WI, the company has a fitness center/gymnasium available to employees.

Laurie O'Loughlin, chief human resources officer for Inpro, calls the company's approach holistic because it offers programs not just for moving, but for eating right as well as taking care of mental health and financial well-being.

The fitness center at headquarters is one of the most important parts of the physical activity program for the

company. The center was originally built and opened in 1995 and has added capacity several times since then.

For example, in 2016, "We expanded the center by about a third larger to update the equipment, which was more than 20 years old by then," O'Loughlin says. The company also added more areas for classes and more machines for muscle strengthening. Beyond updating, the expansion was made because the company itself had grown, doubling the number of employees since the 1990s.

Inpro encourages use of the center as well as other well-being activity participation by keeping costs low or free and offering "a wide variety of activities, which make it convenient and fun for our employees," O'Loughlin says.

The company also offers a Healthy Rewards program, which allows employees a wide variety of ways to earn fitness participation points throughout the year. Once a year, the points are tallied and three tiers of awards are given.

O'Loughlin says the Inpro program seeks to "incentivize healthy choices in all wellness areas to cultivate an overall healthy lifestyle." Offering this variety of ways to be fit is also an important part of the employee acceptance of the program.

"We make sure to be inclusive of the different types of activities employees may choose. They can earn points for



Inpro employees have access to a modern gym and a trainer.



The Inpro gym has been expanded several times, most recently in 2016 when the capacity increased by a third.

onsite and offsite fitness participation; for the number of hours per month for group fitness participation; for fitness consultations, maintaining a weekly fitness regimen, participating on sports teams, training for various running events, and joining challenges and fitness events held by the company,” she says.

A key figure in keeping the program fresh and on target is Jenny Barton, an outside physical fitness expert with JB Personal Fitness, LLC, who is a trainer at the gym, runs its classes and helps employees stay on track.

“Inpro has always been a very wellness conscious company,” Barton says. For trainers, it can be challenging to get the resources to buy equipment, “but here at Inpro, that has never been an issue. It’s refreshing to work with a company whose vision for employees includes health and fitness,” she says.

Barton has worked with Inpro for almost a decade, which has allowed her to create ongoing relationships that help her not only aim the help she provides to individuals as their needs are identified, but also allows her to keep up on what employees overall may need or want.

“The programming that I provide for employees in the gym setting is designed to provide safe and effective exercising/weight training for all skill levels. Fitness classes are held in a large, well-appointed classroom over the lunch hours three days per week,” she says. Inpro also offers a yoga class one day per week.

As a trainer, “I am available for employees three days per week in the gym to assist with workouts and answer questions about health/wellness/body they may have.” She also has a background in physical rehabilitation, which helps her provide assistance to those who may be overcoming difficul-

ties that get in the way of fitness activities.

As a licensed physical therapist assistant and certified trainer, she has constant exposure to educational resources on what’s new in physical fitness and wellness.

“Knowledge is power and definitely brings more ideas and tweaks to our program,” she says.

Barton runs physical testing monthly for those employees who want to keep up with how they are doing or to track points, and she plans special events once a month that can help employees earn more participation points. To keep an even playing field, she ranks employees by age, gender and other categories in awarding and planning. To keep it interesting, she plans company-wide challenges.

“Larger challenges designed to bring about healthier overall habits are offered periodically throughout the year such as contests to cut back on sugar, get proper sleep and move the body,” she says.

Two popular events are the detox week and the Buddy Up challenge.

During detox, employees follow strict guidelines of low-glycemic impact eating. “This action does reduce the waistline, so many look forward to taking the challenge,” Barton reports. During the buddy event, employees find someone to be accountable to for one month of specific requirements for exercise, sleep, drinking water and other goals.

She also often is called upon to test a whole department that has chosen to participate in one of the special events.

“This camaraderie is a great team-building experience,” for those departments, Barton says.

She communicates periodically with all the company employees through email and writing for the company news-

letter to encourage participation throughout the company.

But she says the best way to get the word out has been employee-to-employee communication.

“So much of what I do in the gym and classes is built on personal relationships. Employees know that I have their personal goals and wellness at heart. I care about them. Many see me after chatting to a fellow employee who then suggests they come talk to me. I always say if there is a heartbeat in the room, I am there to help/teach.”

O’Loughlin and Barton both say that the hope for the future is wider acceptance of the need.

“My belief is that if someone understands the why, they will be motivated to pursue the what,” Barton says. “My sign-off at the end of my messages is ‘be well.’ That is what I want for each and every employee,” Barton says.

Tower: Tracking and sharing progress

Tower Industries, LLC, Massillon, OH is an example of a company that is smaller in size but still found a way to add a fitness program to its benefits package. Tower offers the FitBucks Wellness Program, which is based on employees keeping track of activity through individual wrist-wearing trackers. For some employees, that tracker is a Fitbit, which records steps, along with statistics on sleeping, heart rates



“The Inpro program seeks to incentivize healthy choices in all wellness areas to cultivate an overall healthy lifestyle.”

and other key pieces of information.

“We chose this particular program because it didn’t involve a lot of expense or administrative time to manage,” says Kerry Klodt, general manager of Tower, who currently runs the program. “It’s a perk/benefit for employees that they can earn just by participating, and we felt it would keep people engaged in their own health and wellness.”

At the same time, “we wanted to be a company that offers more than good salary. This adds a benefit to our employee program,” she says.

Employees submit a monthly report that gives how many steps each day an employee has taken. For any days they reach more than 4,500, they get a dollar in FitBucks, and if they go above that amount, they get more. For example, if they hit 10,000 in any day, they get \$1.25 and if they go over 20,000 they get \$1.50 for the day. The dollars can add up quickly, and employees can spend those dollars on a list of items geared toward their fitness efforts such as gym memberships, athletic shoes and equipment.

The company rolled out the program in 2018 and chose to offer it initially through Fitbit because of the tracker’s ability to give daily reports on steps. Klodt, who says the company averages 10 to 15 employees enrolled at any time (from its roster of about 60 staff), enters the daily steps each month on a spreadsheet, which takes her 5-10 minutes. The program is no longer limited to one fitness device; however, any activity tracker used to participate has to include a way to track daily steps.

Initially, the program rolled out twice a year, when flyers and emails were sent inviting people to join. COVID-19 got in the way of that goal, but the program is still launched once a year.

The FitBucks program is available to any employees that have been with the company for 90 days, and those that want one, get a Fitbit tracker just for participating. Employees have to meet the minimum activity level of 4,500 steps per day for at least 40 of the first 60 days of the program to

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keep their free trackers or to qualify for equipment reimbursement if they buy their own tracker.

According to Klodt, the program is popular with employees for several reasons, including the fact it's a free company benefit.

"Employees talk to other employees about what they're doing and the free stuff they are getting," Klodt points out. For example, "one employee recently was reimbursed for buying a set of kayaks," she reports.

For the company, the program creates healthier employees, which translates into lower insurance costs, but more importantly, happier employees.

"Let's put it this way. When we talk to potential employees about jobs, we can point out that the solid surface company down the road didn't just reimburse an employee for kayaks," Klodt points out.

The program also encourages employees to interact with other employees, creating chatter and buzz among employees, especially around enrollment time. Fitbit devices allow people to friend other users and then send out challenges on step goals.

"This creates a competitive spirit that keeps the program fun. There is a lot of smack talk and bragging rights when someone hits a certain level of steps," she says.

Part of the idea also is that this program not only takes advantage of peer-to-peer interaction but also allows individuals to have a way to keep themselves on track.

Participant Ron Reolfi, controller and CFO for Tower, explains that, "I owned and used a Fitbit for years before starting at Tower. Our Fitbit program here has served to keep me more focused on my daily and weekly goals."

Rich Kulhanek, program manager for the company, adds that, "I like using the tracker and being part of this program because it helps to keep me accountable."

Tower intends to beef up the promotion of the program now that the pandemic is slowing. Because it's a company perk, the program will soon fall under a new head of human resources.

"Tower believes this program reaps high levels of return," Klodt explains. "We all know that moving is good for us, especially those who work in an office or in an environment where they are indoors all day," Klodt says. "This program lets employees know we care about their health and well-being, which means we are getting a lot of goodwill for a low investment and little risk to the company," she explains. ■

GENILEE SWOPE PARENTE is executive editor of **Cast Polymer Connection**. Please let her know what subjects you'd like to see in the magazine. She can be reached at gsparente@verizon.net.

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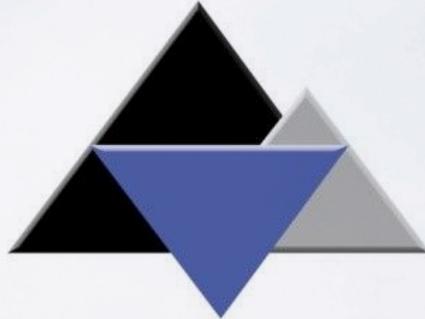
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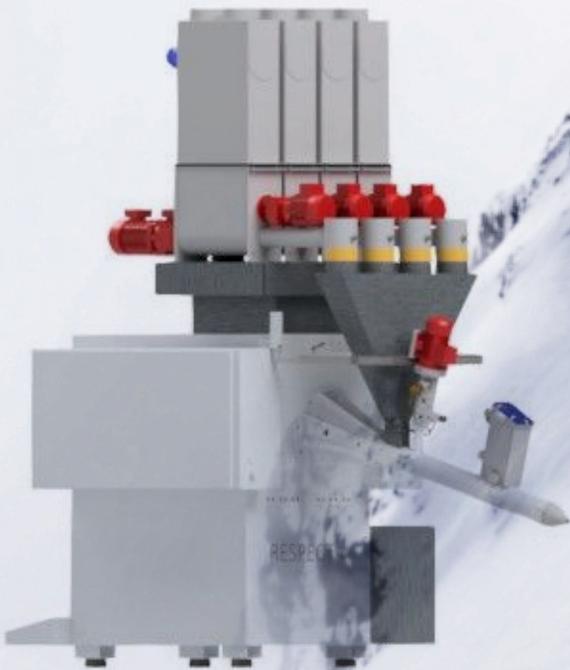
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The Buzz Atlanta coming up in April

The response to ICPA's first-ever spring networking event has been enthusiastic—close to 50 people had registered to

THE ICPA'S SPRING NETWORKING EVENT



attend by press time and, as the event draws near, the numbers continue to climb. The Buzz is April 29 and 30 at the

Embassy Suites by Hilton Atlanta Galleria, Atlanta, GA. As the event's name implies, it was put together to answer a call for more channels of networking and ways to exchange information and discuss trends and issues in the industry.

Attendees will get right to that mission Friday evening with registration at 4 p.m. followed by a two-hour cocktail reception in the atrium of the hotel. On Saturday, morning breakout sessions and roundtable discussions will provide attendees with many opportunities to learn.

Topics for the roundtable discussion will include Integrated software systems, employee hiring and retaining, best business practices, a regulatory update on styrene, tips & tricks from the plant floor and more.

A special luncheon will be held at the hotel followed by a Top Golf event offsite. The group will then reconvene at the hotel for a second, two-hour reception followed by an evening of dining at one of many nearby top-notch restaurants.

The hotel was chosen for its proximity to the downtown area and attractions such as the nearby Truist Park—home of the Atlanta Braves, the Battery area, the Galleria and the Cobb Energy Center.

As of the first week in March, four companies had signed on to sponsor the event: The R.J. Marshall Company, Interplastic Corporation, Huber Engineered Materials and Synmar & Castech. Sponsorships include several marketing opportunities both in Atlanta and afterward through ICPA communication channels (including this magazine). They cost just \$500.

To register, and for the most up-to-date information on the event, go to www.theicpa.com. For specific events and sponsorship, write Executive Director Jennifer Towner at jennifer@theicpa.com.

Dick Higgins passes away

ICPA and members were sad to hear of the death of Richard Higgins, a long-time industry leader who retired

from HK Research last year. Higgins, a 2021 recipient of the association's top honor, the Royce Newsom Pioneer award, gave the association years of his volunteer time on committees and in leadership positions as well as lending advice and guidance to the industry and to individual members. He had more than 60 years in the business beginning in high school. He started HK Research in 1980 and served as its leader since then.

Higgins will be sorely missed by those who benefited from his advice and friendship.

Live Grout Free campaign booming

The Live Grout Free website and campaign are growing and



Sand & Swirl shows off the t-shirts.

gaining speed. The campaign is designed to educate the general public on the benefits of products that don't have grout lines, such as those made with cultured marble and solid surfaces. To accomplish that goal, the website has answers to the most com-

mon questions on the products, an inspiration gallery that shows the beauty of the products and a connection to the ICPA members that offer those products.

Many ICPA members have already participated by sending in photographs and information and by linking to the website. To encourage more participation, Executive Director Jennifer Towner created a t-shirt that urges people to "ask me how to live grout free." Those members who run the Grout Free logo on their company websites and link that logo to the Grout Free website and who tout the campaign on social media get the shirts as a benefit.

For information, contact Executive Director Jennifer Towner at jennifer@theicpa.com. Live Grout Free is at <https://livegroutfree.com>

Hotel finalized, schedule growing for POLYCON 22

The DoubleTree by Hilton Canton Downtown has been chosen as the venue for POLYCON 2022 Ohio. Planning for the event, which is September 19 to 21 in Canton, is well underway. Keynote speaker will be the popular Lisa Ryan, an expert on employee engagement and retention, who spoke at POLYCON 19 and has written books as well as articles for **Cast Polymer Connection** and many other publications.

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THINKING OF TOMORROW

POLYCON includes a day of educational, breakout and round-table discussions as well as several days of more technical learning at PolyTECH Training Sessions. This year, those training sessions will be held at the two host companies: Tower Industries and American Marble Industries.



Lisa Ryan

The association has also arranged to have its annual awards ceremony at a special dinner held at the NFL Hall of Fame.

Registration begins in April. For information and to register, visit www.POLYCONevent.com.

Training and breakouts from the 2021 POLYCON now available

ICPA members now have full access to many of the technical and breakout session videos created during POLYCON 2021 in Salt Lake City, UT. Those videos include technical topics such as gel coat techniques and repair, veining techniques, mold preparation; and general educational sessions such as

sales methods, styrene discussion, the next generation of leadership, using artificial intelligence and more.

To access these videos and other valuable regulatory and technical resources, members can go online to the ICPA website and log in to the members-only section. Members can contact Beth Kubinec at Beth@TheICPA.com for assistance with login information.

Welcome new ICPA members:

- Custom Marble Solutions, Dayton, OH
www.custommarblesolutions.com
- Artistic Marble, LLC, Huntsville, AL
www.Artisticmarblesc.com
- MacKenzie Vault, Inc., East Longmeadow, MA
www.mackenzievault.com



Remodeling boom may peak in 2022

According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, spending for home improvements and repairs will expand at a stronger pace in 2022, but signs point to easing of growth by year-end.

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Leading Indicator of Remodeling Activity – Fourth Quarter 2021



Notes: Improvements include remodels, replacements, additions, and structural alterations that increase the value of homes. Routine maintenance and repairs preserve the current quality of homes. Historical estimates since 2019 are produced using the LIRA model until American Housing Survey benchmark data become available.

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The center’s Leading Indicator of Remodeling Activity (LIRA) projects double-digit gains in renovation and maintenance expenditures that will top out in the third quarter before beginning deceleration.

“As owners continue to navigate the ups and downs of the pandemic’s trajectory, the focus on home improvements for changing wants and needs remains in sharp relief,” according to Carlos Martin, project director of the Remodeling Futures Program for the center.

The LIRA found that spending could reach \$430 billion by the second half of the year, but that spending will face headwinds such as labor costs, construction prices, difficulty retaining contractors and climbing interest rates.

People remodeling willing to pay for luxury bath features

Almost three-quarters of people who responded to a Zillow Research study said they will consider at least one home improvement project in the coming year.

Bathrooms are the most popular room for people to spend their remodeling dollars—more than half of those surveyed said they will consider such a renovation in the next year. They also are willing to pay a premium for spa-like luxuries, according to the study. Buyers said they are willing to pay a 3.6% price premium for curb-less showers, a 3.2% premium

for heated floors and a 2.6% premium for free-standing tubs, the study reported.

In the kitchen, more than 46% of respondents said they would consider remodels in 2022.

Overall, more livable space is a top priority for many homeowners: 31% want office space, 23% want to finish an attic or basement and 21% want to add an accessory dwelling unit or guest house. ■

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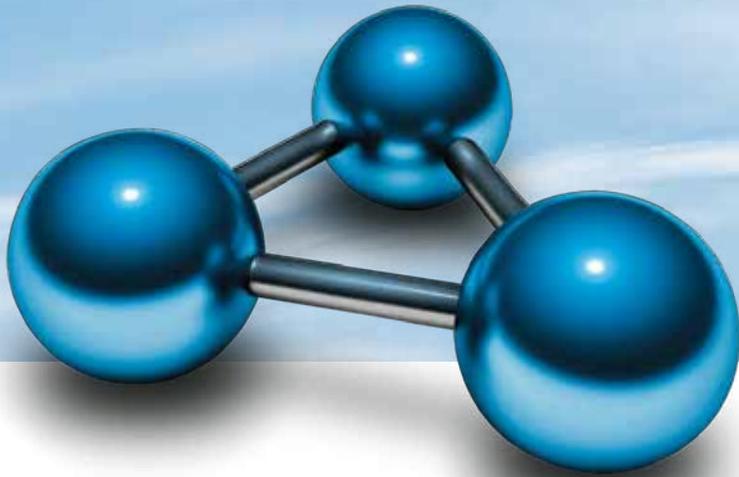
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