



Metropolitan Contract Carpets Increases Market Share With INSTALL Philadelphia

Faster. Better. Cheaper. These are the end users' increasingly frequent requirements for their floorcovering projects. In the past, many mistakenly perceived that working with union labor was an obstacle to these goals. But these misconceptions are quickly being replaced with the newfound respect of end users and general contractors throughout greater Philadelphia as they discover that INSTALL - the United Brotherhood of Carpenters' floorcovering arm - is flexible, cooperative, and professional.

And no one is benefiting more from INSTALL Philadelphia's improved reputation than Metropolitan Contract Carpets, Inc. Covering territory from Princeton, NJ to Wilmington, DE and as far west as Pottstown, Pa., Metropolitan annually completes more than \$25 million of commercial floorcovering work, primarily encompassing carpet, carpet tile, resilient flooring, wood flooring, and subfloor repair.

Metropolitan has been affiliated with the United Brotherhood of Carpenters since its inception nearly 50 years ago, but the floorcovering contractor has seen significant changes in the way the union does business since the establishment of the INSTALL program.

INSTALL, which is an acronym for the International Standards and Training Alliance, is a precedent-setting initiative created by labor and management to address the shortage of adequately trained installers and to solve the problem of costly floorcovering repair. As its name implies, INSTALL focuses on forming alliances with industry leaders so that a consistent, standardized training program can be created and supported.

The floorcovering installers of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters Floorcoverers' Local 1823 in Philadelphia are among the first in the country to adopt the INSTALL program. Steve Brittin, a sales representative for Metropolitan, has experienced the positive effects as Local 1823's Council Representative John McGrath and his entire staff have embraced INSTALL's philosophy of business-minded partnership.

"Local 1823 has very good management right now, and they've taken some smart tacks on some important business decisions," Brittin said. "I perceive John McGrath to be not only a decent business agent, but also a good businessman."

Brittin believes that the INSTALL focus on flexibility and collaboration has enabled Local 1823 to open up new business avenues.

"I am seeing the union be rewarded fairly quickly for their emphasis on partnership," Brittin said. "There have been short-term gains as well as long-term gain. They are getting more business from areas where they never got it before, specifically open shop general contractors and they're leaving a good impression. Now, when Local 1823 knocks on an end user's door, the end user welcomes them in as a resource for getting good work done and getting it done quicker."

And as end users demand higher quality floorcovering work with faster turnaround times, Brittin has seen more contractors relying on what he refers to as the union's "seemingly unlimited trained resource pool of labor."

But while INSTALL Philadelphia could offer a vast, skilled workforce, in the minds of many contractors and end users, the union still had one hurdle to cross - cost.

This was a hurdle that was surmounted with relative ease though, thanks to INSTALL's cooperative emphasis.

"There have been occasions when the union has negotiated concessions on labor rates to level the playing field and to make the union contractor more competitive in bidding situations," Brittin said. "But it has not just been about making price concessions - it is about communicating to the rest of the building trades and really putting a superior package together. This is not a hit-or-miss process. We're taking an insightful, professional stance to bidding projects. The nonunion GCs that we've worked with recently recognize that it's not about being as low as a nonunion floorcovering contractor. It's about the whole package that INSTALL brings to the table - well-trained, professional floorcoverers who get the job done right and fast."

INSTALL Philadelphia left such a good impression on one nonunion GC after a small floorcovering job that the contractor brought the union on for a second job without even bidding it.

"We were working with Wyeth Pharmaceuticals on the first building of its High View project," Brittin said. "The contractor saw that our people were productive and safety-conscious. Our workers didn't engage in any activities that interfered with the job they were hired to do. As a result, the contractor gave us the work on the second building as well. Now, we bid to that contractor A the time, and we have been awarded additional work."

Brittin has found that ultimately, it's the new business direction that INSTALL Philadelphia has taken that has enabled the union to win over nonunion contractors.

"Cooperation and good business strategy are fresh concepts with our union, and it is being well received," Brittin said. "Nonunion contractors are embracing the process and growing with it, not in spite of it. When contractors worry less about the cost of using union labor, and more about the professionalism and execution of their workers on the job, everyone wins."