

Career Highlights of Dean Thompson

LaGrange Ga. (May 3, 2022) Dean Thompson grew up in a small Nebraska town; an authentic, American heartland story. He and his wife Shirley met in Lincoln while attending the University of Nebraska. In the spring of 1968, Dean was a college senior thinking about his future, when one of his professors suggested that he check out Armstrong. "They're the kind of company I think you'd enjoy," he advised Dean.

That led to a trip to Pennsylvania for an interview, and the beginning step in a long floor covering career. Dean's first Armstrong assignment was distributor sales in Columbia, South Carolina, where he also did a lot of supplemental selling to retail chains and building supply stores. From there, Armstrong transferred him to Charlotte, on to New Orleans, and then promoted Dean to their New York office.

Dean's former Armstrong district sales manager had joined Milliken and Company, and invited him to come down to LaGrange, Georgia for a Milliken interview since Milliken had recently acquired Callaway Mills and was looking to expand its executive team. Impressed with the warmth and small-town Southern hospitality, Dean and Shirley decided to stay, and Dean joined Milliken there in 1972. Dean advanced to become a west coast regional sales manager and lived for a couple of years in Los Angeles, before moving back to LaGrange to take on a new role and where he went on to serve in a variety of executive roles.

In 2005, Dean retired from a career at Milliken. Over those 33 years at Milliken, he had engaged with several consulting companies, and in retirement, became a consultant himself working as a principal of the Hatteras Group, based in North Carolina, and was engaged in a variety of flooring industry consulting projects over a two-year period including work with the Carpet and Rug Institute and Mannington.

While consulting with Mannington, Dean discovered a small recruitment ad in a trade magazine looking for new leadership at the Resilient Floor Covering Institute (RFCI), and the contact was, of all places, at Mannington and his long-time friend Tom Davis, Mannington CEO.

In his interview for the position, Dean admitted, "I'm not an association guy. I'm not someone that can just come in and be an administrator. I'm not interested in that." He continued, "But if you're looking for somebody who can take a strategic approach and maybe help expand the industry and expand the industry organization, I think I'd be pretty good at that."

And so, what started out as a brief stint of a year or two, turned into a 15-year legacy of service at RFCI as its President and CEO.

From that point in 2007 Dean determined that RFCI "needed to make the circle bigger" and started a plan to grow the membership by adding membership categories for foreign flooring manufacturers and those in the industry supply chain.

He also realized that there were many governmental and non-governmental issues that had "tentacles" and that were bigger than just the flooring industry. So, he allied RFCI with the Vinyl Institute, the American Chemistry Council, the National Association of Manufacturers, the US Chamber of Commerce, and others as strategic advocacy partners.

Under Dean's leadership, RFCI has accomplished much over his tenure:

- *Strong growth in all RFCI membership categories*
- *Exceptional financial growth for the organization*
- *A well-thought-out and successful governance structure*
- *Strategic management to drive effectiveness*
- *A strong regulatory engagement and issues management plan*
- *Advocacy for the Resilient Flooring category with many governmental and non-governmental entities*
- *Sustainability advancements, including key environmental certification programs*
- *Recycling research to advance industry recycling capabilities*
- *Development of strategic branding and messaging for the industry including its highly successful Beautifully Responsible® social campaign*
- *Education for the Architectural and Design community*

When the Great Recession hit the flooring industry in 2008, he maintained a steady course for RFCI. He believed that even in a down economy, membership must think long term. "I think one of the key things is being willing to stand up and make an investment as a key partner in the industry. Not necessarily worried about an immediate return but knowing that it's an investment in an organization that is working on behalf of the industry." As a result, membership longevity is a characteristic of RFCI, with very little turnover.

The resilient flooring category is one sector of the larger flooring industry. When Dean joined RFCI this category had sales of \$2.3 billion and was about 9% of the overall market. Today this category has grown to over \$9 billion and approximately 30% of the market and will soon be the largest category in the flooring category with carpet falling to second place. Dean stated that "riding this growth curve has been a real pleasure and with significant industry growth comes significant responsibility to insure the industry organization can continue to support its membership in a major way and I believe we are well set to do just that."

In 2021, Dean was awarded Industry Partner of the Year by The Vinyl Institute.

Dean always made sure that RFCI was populated with the best leadership in the industry and with top industry executives serving two-year intervals on the RFCI Board of Directors. Two years ago, Dean began planning for his retirement with a goal of leaving RFCI in the hands of continued strong industry-based leadership. On January 1, 2022, 34-year industry veteran Bill Blackstock assumed Dean's role as RFCI President/CEO with Dean remaining on board as President Emeritus through June 2022.



Dean Thompson with Teresa Williford, Director of Programs/Services, RFCI