

Central Penn Business Journal - cpbj.com

Construction Manufacturing & Distribution

Flooring company Ecore sees growth in hotel, health care markets

By **Shelby White**, June 8, 2018 at 3:00 AM



Arthur Dodge III is president and CEO of Ecore International, based in Manheim Township. - (Photo / AMY SPANGLER)

Arthur Dodge III never wanted to be involved in his family's business.

It was stupid, he had told his late father, Arthur Dodge Jr., who was then the chairman and president of the Dodge Cork Co., a supplier of cork floor and cork underlayment, cork stoppers, as well as specialty cork items for wall coverings and bulletin boards.

But after his father showed him a little piece of recycled, re-bonded rubber he had created in the company's lab in the late 1980s, Dodge became intrigued.

"What do you do with it?" Dodge asked his father.

"I don't know. You're the smart one in the family, you figure it out," his father replied.

The younger Dodge did some research and found that recycled materials like plastic, metal and paper were billion-dollar markets.

Not a lot of people were recycling rubber, however.

"So I said, 'Well, either it's impossible or it's hard, but it's a great opportunity,' because at the same time, there were all these scrap tires and the green movement was wildly popular and recycling was coming in vogue. Everybody was throwing money at the problem, but nobody had a solution," Dodge said.

Soon after, Nickelodeon in New York City ordered \$350,000 worth of speckled rubber floor tiles, based on the sample created by the older Dodge.

"It was total luck. Total serendipity," Dodge said. "At the end of the day, I was hooked because we had taken this material, turned it into a floor, sold it for a good price and I said, 'My God, if it's that easy, this is a huge market.'"

Those speckled pieces of rubber eventually became the foundation of **Ecore International**, a flooring company based in Manheim Township. Dodge is president and CEO. Ecore recycles rubber-containing materials, such as tires and by-products from the petroleum industry, and transforms them into performance surfaces.

But before it was Ecore, it was known as Dodge-Regupol.

Dodge needed to scale the business quickly after the Nickelodeon order, so he approached The Regupol Group, a subsidiary of BSW, a German recycled-rubber manufacturer, for help.

They formed a partnership in 1989 that lasted about 20 years.

"I had a vision for taking the business to the next level. We didn't agree. We divorced," Dodge said of the 2008 separation.

Regupol now operates out of Lebanon as **Regupol America**.

Dodge renamed his company Ecore. Today it employs 500 people and also operates a 35-acre, 400,000 square-foot campus in York Township where it recycles tires. The York plant was purchased in 2008 after Ecore parted ways with Regupol.

Last year, Ecore generated more than \$150 million in annual revenue. It has made a name for itself in the athletic world, producing turf, track, and other performance and fitness surfaces.

Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, trains on Ecore flooring. The White House and Camp David are also equipped with Ecore fitness flooring, Dodge said.

Closer to home, Ecore installed 350,000 square feet of sports surfacing in one of the country's largest indoor sports facilities, **Spooky Nook**, which is in East Hempfield Township.

"Working with Ecore has been an amazing experience. They're an extremely professional, international company that happens to be right down the road from us," said Jim Launer, chief athletic officer at Spooky Nook.

The partnership has proved mutually beneficial.

"One of the great things about having a partnership with Spooky Nook is when people come and visit us, we can say, 'Not only can we make really cool stuff, but we can show you how it works.' So we take them to Spooky Nook," Dodge said.

Ecore has found other markets besides athletics.

Its customers include hotel franchises like Hilton, Marriott, Holiday Inn and Starwood.

"Right now if you go into a hotel room, it's typically carpet. That's all going away because women, primarily business women, don't like it," Dodge said. Hotel chains, he said, have found that women think carpet is dirty.

By 2024 every major hotel chain will have pulled up their carpet and replaced it with hard surfaces, Dodge said.

But while laminate or other hard surfaces such as hardwood, linoleum or vinyl are aesthetically pleasing, they can be an acoustic nightmare. Hard surfaces amplify sound. Carpet keeps rooms quiet.

Dodge said Ecore flooring can reduce noise by adding a rubber backing to hard surfaces. Rubber, he explained, absorbs sound.

Health care is the newest market the company has entered.

Ecore believes its flooring systems could change the nature of health care facilities by mitigating 25 percent of fall-related injuries. Rubber absorbs energy and returns energy, which helps lessen the blow from falls.

The company is working with national health care chains to test its flooring in patient care rooms to see if it reduces the cost and incidence of falls.

Manufacturing a new culture

The birth of Ecore inspired Arthur Dodge III to invest heavily in workplace culture.

Ecore's headquarters in Manheim Township are equipped with elliptical machines, a furnished living area and children's toys – the office is child-friendly. And every day, Ecore leaders meet with their employees to go over the company's mission and culture.

"It began to really click when I separated from my former partners and I said, 'This is now all on me.' When it was all on me, I knew I had one shot at getting it right. And so I really spent a lot of time listening to everybody who worked here," said Dodge, who is Ecore's president and CEO.

Maggie Baker, sample department supervisor at Ecore, said the company's culture is vital. She has worked there for 10 years.

"Working for a company that sincerely values its employees and encourages and empowers every single one of us to make people's lives better is a refreshing change from the norm in the manufacturing industry," Baker said.

"If that's proven to be true with independently verifiable evidence, then it would change the nature of the building. If we can eliminate injuries from falls, the floor is free. This is something that is now being used and or tested in every major health care facility in the country," Dodge said.

Besides mitigating injuries patients sustain when they fall, Ecore said its floors could also help patients by reducing noise.

"The number one thing that gets people out of a hospital quicker is sleep. The one thing that they don't get, because the hospital is noisy, is sleep," Dodge said.

Ergonomics also factor into Ecore's potential appeal, Dodge said.

Ecore flooring, he said, could benefit professionals, like nurses, who work on their feet all day.

"We have testimonials from people who have been on other surfacing and our surfacing and people who have plantar fasciitis say it's gone away. People who have lower back pain say it's gone away. People who have been on medication say they're off," Dodge said.

It's a difference that cannot be achieved by proper footwear along, Dodge said.

Most shoes are designed to alleviate the fact that floors are often rock hard. Shoes provide a cushion.

"But it can be too much or too little depending upon how hard or how soft the surface truly is. We try to engineer that performance more reliably so that when somebody is actually wearing shoes that you would wear in a health care environment, they interface better with the substrate and the flooring," Dodge said.

The thought of Jeff Bezos – head of online giant Amazon – deciding to get into the floor-covering industry is what keeps Dodge up at night.

"He's a death star when it comes to absorbing all of the businesses that he decides to get into," Dodge said.

But Dodge has never worried his company wouldn't make it.

"In my role, I don't think I'm allowed to have that thought. It's just not what a leader does. I believe so strongly in our mission and what we are trying to accomplish that there is no alternative. It has to happen," Dodge said.

Also Popular on CPBJ

- **Worley & Obetz: What we know now**
- **Penn Stone to kick off new line of outdoor pizza ovens**
- **New executive director takes helm at York arts nonprofit**
- **Fulton and F&M Trust confirm credit loss due to Worley & Obetz**

Shelby White

Shelby White covers banking and finance, law and Lancaster County for the Central Penn Business Journal. For tips, email her at swhite@cpbj.com.

+ Leave a Comment

0 Comments

