

WALKING THE WALK

EARTH FARE GOES "GREEN" IN FLOORING SYSTEMS, TOO

The 13 Earth Fare supermarkets you'll find in the southeastern United States specialize in bringing natural and organic food and products to a dedicated base of environmental and health-minded consumers.

In short, it's an absolute haven for those who live a "green" lifestyle.

Perhaps it's no surprise, then, that Earth Fare applies the same level of attention to environmental concerns in the building and remodeling processes that go into opening an Earth Fare store. These include construction with

recycled building materials and using low-VOC, environmentally friendly coating and flooring products wherever possible.

For Jim St. Charles, vice-president of engineering and construction for the Asheville, N.C.-based firm, it's a simple matter of walking the walk if you're talking the talk.

"We only sell what we call 'clean product,'" says St. Charles. "The real foodies and vegans know what we mean by that. We did some research and found that

The sales floor at a North Carolina Earth Fare store reflects the chain's emphasis on locally produced 'clean' product.



our customers trust us more than the competition to truly have clean product in our stores. If it doesn't meet our requirements, you won't find it on Earth Fare shelves.

"As a result, we are very concerned about running a 'green' business as it applies to operations. Anything we can do to give us a greener box, we're going to do it. We're reclaiming the heat from our refrigeration systems and using that to heat our stores, for example. And we're studying solar water heating systems that can bring water to 180 degrees.

"So when we learned that Sherwin-Williams had a line of green coating and floor systems, we put it in our spec."

Preferred contractor

That spec might as well include Surface Concepts, Inc., the Burlington, N.Car.-based General Polymers-certified flooring contractor that has earned the right to install the flooring systems in all production and storage areas at the Earth Fare stores. Jimmy Huffines is the company's president and is a flooring veteran of more than 25 years.

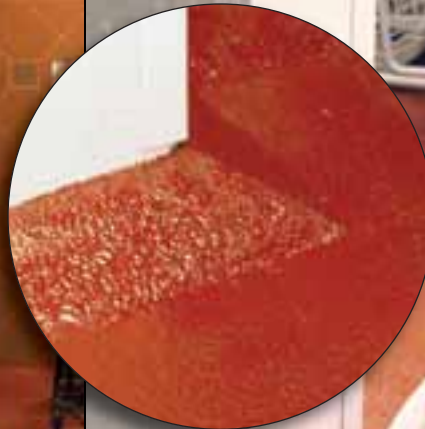
"There are certain contractors we like to take everywhere because we trust

them," says St. Charles. "Jimmy's one of them."

"What they like about us is that when they say, 'Jump,' we say, 'How high?'" adds Huffines. "We try to provide that level of service to all our customers."

While Earth Fare rarely asks Surface Concepts personnel to jump, St. Charles has made a Sherwin-Williams Fastop Flooring System a recurring request in production areas of new Earth Fare locations. The floors will be installed either in existing buildings that Earth Fare buys or leases and remodels, and there they can be applied right over existing floors. In a new construction scenario, they'll be installed on scarified concrete. The low-odor, low-VOC system consists of a water based, urethane resin and a proprietary cementitious aggregate blend that is ideal for food processing and commercial kitchens where frequent cleanings, thermal shock conditions and mild acidic exposure are present.

Below left, prep areas at Earth Fare stores are finished with a Sherwin-Williams Fastop Flooring System. Below right, Jimmy Huffines points to a cove base (inset) his company installed to help deal with stagnant water.



"We absolutely love these urethane floors," says St. Charles. "What we really like about it is you get a safe, non-skid floor that's cleanable. What we fight in the grocery business is if your floor is too non-skid, it's not cleanable. But this one is the perfect balance. Plus it's a great look."

Effective cove base

The Fastop system also allowed Huffines to build a 45-degree cove base up to 1 1/2 inches thick and 4 inches high along the base of the walls in many prep areas. The coves help move water that would otherwise be stagnant.

"There are areas, such as under a refrigerated display case, where stagnant water can accumulate and be difficult to remove," says St. Charles. "The cove base keeps water out of those areas and also keeps water from seeping up into the walls."

St. Charles specifies Fastop floors for about 4,500 to 5,000 square feet in a typical Earth Fare store.

"It's a turnkey job that takes about four days," Huffines says. "By the time we're done the lighting, signs, air conditioning can come in right behind us, but once the installation starts, we can't stop. Our crews really have to know what they're doing and don't quit till it's done. There's no time to let the grass grow."

Architectural coatings, meanwhile, are also supplied by Sherwin-Williams. St. Charles says the distribution chain — Sherwin-Williams stores exist near every present and proposed Earth Fare location — is one of the key advantages in single-sourcing Earth Fare's coatings needs. He also likes the fact that Sherwin-Williams offers a line of environment-friendly



Jim St. Charles, Earth Fare vice-president of engineering and construction (left), and Jimmy Huffines, president of Surface Concepts, Inc.

waterbased interior coatings, which figure to be used as Earth Fare doubles its presence in the Southeast United States in the near future.

"We'd like to add four to six stores next year and eventually get up to 25 to 30 of them," says St. Charles. "There's opportunity in this market, and I think that most hit home when I learned that half my teenage daughters' circle of friends are vegetarians. And you'll see in our stores that it's not just young people, it's

baby boomers too that are reaping the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.

"We're pleased we have a supplier in Sherwin-Williams that fits our way of doing business."

CONTRACTOR SPOTLIGHT SURFACE CONCEPTS, INC.

Jimmy Huffines has seen plenty in a coating, concrete and flooring background that goes back to the late 1970s.

But in 1991, when he was well entrenched in both the tank lining and concrete business, he saw the future in Sherwin-Williams-General Polymers flooring systems.

"It was rare to see a manufacturer that could work in tank linings and flooring systems, but I wanted that diversity," says Huffines, the president of Surface Concepts, Inc. "Besides, I like to be different anyway. And it looked like it was the future."

Indeed it was. Huffines' company — truly a family affair with wife Pam, son Chad and daughter-

in-law Kim involved in the business — has grown to 25 employees in a competitive market.

"When I started, I don't think there were five flooring companies within 500 miles," he says. "Now I can't count all of them within 50 miles on my fingers and toes."

"But the key to success is service and understanding up front the new technology available from manufacturers like Sherwin-Williams," he adds. "You're only as good as the people you partner up with, and I've tried to surround myself with the best, the type of people who will stand behind me. Sherwin-Williams definitely stands behind me and their product."