

DRESS REHEARSALS

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT FOR CONTRACTOR IN THEATER, LAB PROJECTS

David T. Bentley, on stage at the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts. Above right, the floor of the Integrated Manufacturing Lab on the Illinois State University campus.



David T. Bentley didn't have to look closely at the floor of the 85-year-old Bloomington (Ill.) Center for the Performing Arts to see that the concrete painting that had been specified for the job simply wasn't the right solution.

"There was spider-webbing everywhere, literally thousands of cracks in the concrete. The place was a mess," recalls Bentley, the president of Commercial & Industrial Coatings, based in Bloomington. The floor was a part of a high-visibility renovation project for the 1300-seat historic theatre, which is clearly a source of community pride in this central Illinois city. Bentley's company was also doing most of the repainting in the building as well, but he had no concerns that his paint crews could handle that part of the task, or the cleaning of the stone outside the building, the labor for which he donated. But for Bentley, a former musician and a patron of the arts who still enjoys getting his tools out for challenging flooring projects, the floor specification needed fixing.

"I had to convince them there was a better solution than painting it."

Bentley believed that a Sherwin-Williams General Polymers epoxy flooring system would provide both a more attractive and more durable floor for the theater's main level and balcony, which would be subject to foot traffic and chemical exposure, such as road salts and cleaners. But to get the city to write a change order on its partially taxpayer-funded project would take more than his word.

At A Glance

Contractor David T. Bentley of Commercial & Industrial Coatings finished floors in his own office to prepare for outside projects.

Two recent projects demonstrated the versatility of Sherwin-Williams Ceramic Carpet and epoxy flooring systems.

So in order to prove that he had the right product for the job and could apply it successfully, Bentley found a 5-foot-by-8-foot patch of floor that would be subject to a heavy level of construction traffic during the renovation. He blasted the area, routed out the cracks and patched with Sherwin-Williams Epo-Flex primer, laid about 20 mils of the system's membrane and applied two coats of epoxy with a polypropylene non-skid additive.

"Then we just let everybody trample it for eight or nine months," says Bentley.

The result?

"It held up perfectly. We cleaned it up and the city of Bloomington decided it was worth the investment.

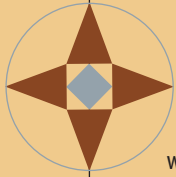
I think it was a very wise move on their part."

The project did have its challenges. Heating and air conditioning comes up through some 200 eight-inch circular vents located under seats on the main floor, leaving an obstacle course of pitfalls that applicators had to work around. And the slope of both the main floor and the balcony made some tasks difficult, but the quick-setting properties of the epoxy even in high-build situations ensured that working from the higher levels on down, an even floor was the result.

"The facility manager said 'I'll bet this floor looks like this in 50 years,'" recalls Bentley. "I said, 'I'll bet it does, too.'"

Bentley can make such claims with some confidence since he's made





a point of achieving near-perfection in his flooring projects. His company — which turned about \$1.5 million in 2005 revenues — and staff — many of whom have been with Bentley for 13 years — are as comfortable on the site of a wastewater treatment plant as they are painting rooms in a university dormitory. But it's in two areas — factory work, in which Bentley developed expertise early in his career, and floors — where they've managed to separate from their competition.

Particularly in floors, Bentley has found experience to be the best teacher. To that end, he used the Ceramic Carpet system to produce a challenging mosaic pattern in his own office in 2001, and another multi-colored project in his facility's conference room in 2003. While he needed floors in the rooms, he says he largely produced both floors to gain experience at multiple color projects.

"The hardest part is separating the colors, making sure the granules don't move from one color area to another when you apply a clear coat, and keeping them raised to the same height, or flush with each other," he says. "What I found was that you really need to sand and vacuum it thoroughly and get any loose quartz out of there so you don't have any lines. And then you can clear coat the entire floor one time."



At left, long-term performance is expected out of the floor of the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts. Above, Bentley in his office with the Ceramic Carpet design he created in 2001.

this time, the architect knew a ceramic carpet would provide a better long-term flooring solution. But this project had a multi-color design element of radial arcs and X's that would be difficult to produce. With the experience on his own office under his belt, Bentley was confident he could deliver.

"Before the contract was even awarded, the project manager pulled me aside and said, 'Hey — can you do this?'" Bentley recalls. "It was complex. But I wanted the project because I knew I could do the best job."

Rather than applying two layers of color, Bentley applied a single base color in the first epoxy coat, then applied the design in only the second coat, helping ensure a more uniform application. The result of the project is a lab and classroom of which the university is very proud.

"There's no other lab like it," says Dr. Kevin Devine of ISU's department of technology. "We're very happy with it."

According to Bentley, it's the practice that helped make it perfect.

Those lessons paid dividends when Bentley took on a floor project at Illinois State University last winter. With a \$1.2 million grant from the Caterpillar foundation, the school set out to establish a state-of-the-art Integrated Manufacturing Lab and classroom, each about 30 by 50 feet.

Like the theater project, the specification called for staining of concrete, which would have been trenched and partially replaced during the construction, and