

It all started with Mr. McNabb making a clock out of carpet for Ford Motor Company

By George Moses

How do you go from selling carpeting out of an old gas station to being a market leader in exhibition flooring and installation with worldwide clients in hundreds of auto shows, trade shows and special events? There's only one way. Lots of hard work. That's the story of Donald E. McNabb, who began his career as a carpet installer with a dream of owning a carpet business. He first purchased a small gas station in Detroit at the corner of Fenkell and Berg Rd. near Telegraph in the Redford area. His business was growing, so he packed up his shop and moved to Southfield. The new location was on 8 Mile Rd. west of Lahser. The building had three times the space plus room for three offices. McNabb engaged in every part of his work.

"What Mr. McNabb would do is he would cut carpet for the next day and load the trucks for the installers. Then after the installers went out he would put on his suit, become the sales person and sell carpet. So he was like a

one man band doing everything," said Frank Roberson, Retail Mgr. at D.E. McNabb Co.

"He began serving the auto show business when Ford went to Mr. McNabb and asked him if he would craft a 20 foot clock out of carpet. He gladly accepted the offer and created the clock for Ford. Buick quickly followed as his second auto client.

"Mr. McNabb's oldest son, Doug had been helping his dad since age 16. When he was older, he noticed a piece of land for sale near Milford conveniently located near I-96. And they

purchased the land, not knowing at the time that it would become as populated as it is right now."

"It was perfect for shipping and receiving. The Grand opening was in June, 1985. At the time, the showroom had no carpet on the floor, giving it a warehouse look."

"The large overhead door leading from the warehouse to the showroom was used to bring in rolls of carpet to be stacked.

Two salespeople from Southfield were hired and a third after the store/warehouse was opened. The employees thought they would never be able to fill the place."

"Right now, McNabb does auto shows all over the United States and Canada. And it all started with Mr. McNabb making a clock out of carpet for Ford Motor Company."

D.E. McNabb is now celebrating 62 years in the carpeting business.



Frank Roberson, Retail Mgr.,
D.E. McNabb Company



The extensive selection of hardwood and laminate flooring department at D.E. McNabb Company's showroom



D.E. McNabb Co. Flooring is at the Milford Road exit of I-96

The large banners are now facing traffic on Milford Road and I-96, where McNabb's large retail store and warehouses are located. Their official anniversary sale is August 1 through 4, but they will be celebrating all month long.

"What I'm trying to do is let people know that we've got high end carpets. We've got the same carpet line, Fabrica, that they use in the White House," said Frank Roberson, McNabb's Retail Manager.

In stock is carpeting from over 20 carpet mills, plus hardwood floors, laminate floors, ceramic tile floors, vinyl floors and used auto show carpet.

"There are three high end hardwoods that the whole industry respects and Lauzon is one of them," said Roberson. "It's a company out of Canada. They are approximately 30 years old so they've been able to take advantage of the latest advances in technology. Anybody can cut a tree down, but what they do with it after they cut it down makes the difference. So if you've got a company that's using the latest technology you can see how the engineering comes together with the tongue and the groove. How precision the fit is. There is no slop there. No play. You can see that all the boards are going to be within a millimeter of each other in height. The beveled edge is going to be straight from one end of the plank to the other. The boards are not going to be bowed or warped. They're going to be dried out to less than 6% moisture by the time it comes to your house. So the board is not green and drying out on

your floor and warping and twisting. When we put it down and we lock it together it's gonna be like you're gonna see it 10 or 15 years from now."

I asked how big the residential flooring and carpeting business is compared to the commercial, trade show part of the business. Roberson replied that the auto show segment is about 10 times the size of the retail segment. "The growth of the business is taking place in the retail section. Unless the auto companies start another auto show somewhere, that business is going to stay about the same size for the foreseeable future," said Roberson.

"We sell the used auto show carpet for 33 cents a square foot. During this sale we're selling it for 19 cents. You can get used carpet that's been on the floor at the auto show for approximately a week or week and a half and we're selling it for 19 cents."

"We do carpet and flooring for the majority of the auto shows all over the United States and Canada. So, our business has expanded from where we started in 1951."

Today, the Donald E. McNabb Company has grown and expanded beyond the Detroit automobile industry to worldwide clients in hundreds of auto shows, trade shows and special events. With 62 years of experience, the Donald E. McNabb Company is a market leader in exhibition flooring and installation.

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