MEET NWFA MANUFACTURER MEMBERS IN THE BADGER STATE

Wisconsin is home to dairy farming, badgers, beer, and its residents affectionately are known as “Cheeseheads.” However, the state also has a long history with forest products. In fact, forest land covers almost half of Wisconsin’s total land area,1 and more than 63,000 people are employed by its forest products industry2. Lumber and wood products make up 18 percent of Wisconsin’s forest product exports3.

It’s no wonder there is such a strong contingent of NWFA manufacturer members located in Wisconsin. As the 2020 NWFA Expo was originally supposed to be held in Milwaukee, we wanted to introduce you to some of these manufacturers. Read on to learn about their products in the wood flooring industry, and their recommendations on what to see and do if you’re ever in the area.

Aacer Flooring
PESHTIGO

Since its inception in 1998, Aacer Flooring has called Wisconsin home. While the company’s wood flooring can be found worldwide, all of its manufacturing is done in Peshtigo under one roof at a 350,000-square-foot facility. This includes kiln drying, manufacturing solid and engineered, prefinishing, texturing, and shipping.

“Due to our location and access to raw materials, Northern Hard Maple is our signature product. Aacer derives from the Latin word, Acer, which means maple,” says Ray Webb, General Manager of Aacer Flooring. “Being a manufacturer of solid and engineered and prefinished and unfinished flooring, we are truly a one-stop-shop for hardwood flooring needs.”

With close to 200 team members, Aacer is one of the larger employers in the area. They are a member of the Peshtigo Chamber of Commerce and support local schools via scholarships, work programs, donations, and contributing materials for gymnasium projects. That’s because, in addition to providing flooring for the residential and commercial market, Aacer also manufactures sports flooring systems. On a national scale, Aacer has also contributed to the NWFA’s efforts with the Gary Sinise Foundation’s R.I.S.E. (Restoring Independence Supporting Empowerment) program, which provides specially adapted smart homes for severely wounded veterans and first responders.

Wisconsin FAST FACTS

POPULATION: 5.8+ Million
CAPITAL: Madison
LARGEST CITY: Milwaukee
NICKNAME: The Badger State
STATE TREE: Sugar Maple
ACRES OF FOREST: 17 Million
LUMBER AND WOOD PRODUCTS EXPORT VALUE: $270+ Million

Sources: 1. Source: Forest Inventory and Analysis National Program
2. Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Annual 2018 QCEW
3. Source: U.S. Census Trade Data Set via WISERTrade 2018 Exports from Wisconsin to all countries

WHEN IN WISCONSIN ...

AACER FLOORING: Enjoy an Old Fashioned and cheese curds, and visit Lambeau Field, home of the Green Bay Packers.
Forever Barnwood began three and a half years ago when Chad Bleeker and Jason Bast saw where the reclaimed market was going and thought there had to be a way to make “barnwood” from new wood. From there, a patent-pending process began for making new wood look old.

“Forever Barnwood is made from fresh cut Wisconsin white pine, kiln-dried, and individually hand-processed into a variety of barn wood products,” explains James Krier, National Sales Director for Forever Barnwood.

Action Floor Systems

The business of wood flooring runs four generations deep for Tom Abendroth, president of Action Floor Systems. His great-grandfather, Albert Abendroth, started milling maple flooring, which he notes was the beginning of the maple flooring industry in the United States. His great-grandfather, grandfather (Walter Abendroth), and father (Carl Abendroth) are all in the Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association Hall of Fame.

Tom Abendroth and Dan Corullo, vice president and co-founder, launched Action Floor Systems in 1988.

“They consider themselves a “sports floor systems” company since they also design the product that goes underneath the hardwood flooring and offer sustainable products.

“Since this is where we got our start, hardwood maple sports flooring is kind of the heart and soul of Action Floors,” says Abendroth. “We have a variety of hardwood maple floor systems for our customers to choose from, and they’re perfect for sports like basketball, volleyball, and racquetball.”

Action Floor Systems has approximately 100 employees, and is growing. All of their manufacturing takes place in Mercer, a town of fewer than 1,000 people. They support national wellness organizations.

events, sponsorships, conservation efforts, and health and charities, and local school programs and athletics, fundraising for our customers to choose from, and they’re perfect for sports like basketball, volleyball, and racquetball.”

Tom Abendroth and Dan Corullo, vice president and co-founder, launched Action Floor Systems in 1988.

“The company believes in making a difference in the communities where they operate via “Bostik Friends,” which is a group of employees who identify and coordinate volunteer opportunities for Bostik employees, their families, and friends.

WHEN IN WISCONSIN …

BOSTIK INC.: Go to a Brewers game and tailgate at Miller Park or tour the many breweries in the area.

WHEN IN WISCONSIN …

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Great Lakes Custom Tool Mfg. Inc.
PESHTIGO

More than 40 years ago, Russ Martin had a full-time job at a local paper company and sharpened saws on the side for some “fun money.” By 1979, it became evident there was a need for custom cutting tools, so Martin became a full-time tool maker, and incorporated Great Lakes Carbide Tool Mfg. Inc. To better reflect all of the company’s offerings, it later became Great Lakes Custom Tool Mfg. Inc. (GLCT).

Growth has remained steady, and a 20,000-square-foot addition is expected to be completed in the spring of this year, bringing the company to approximately 100,000 square feet of space. They are known for the Great-Loc® Insert, PCD (diamond-tipped) tongue and groove cutters, end match blades, and Helicarb® cutters.

“The true source of quality resides with every one of our people,” says Martin, Head Coach/Owner of GLCT. “Each project, no matter the size or complexity, is an opportunity for us to reinforce our customers’ faith in us by consistently delivering the highest level of service and products.”

GLCT works closely with the area schools and technical colleges, introducing students to CNC machining and overall tool manufacturing, and donating tooling to the schools for education purposes.

Great Lakes Veneer began in Wisconsin in 1894, with Peter C. Rogers and Peter Johnson cutting wood excelsior. The company steadily grew and created different wood products along the way, including wooden cheese boxes, wooden golf club heads, door parts, musical instruments, skateboards, and wood floors.

Great Lakes Veneer is still a family-owned business and is most known in the wood flooring industry for producing rotary and sliced face veneer for engineered wood floors. From log procurement to manufacturing veneer, it all takes place in Marion, where they have a 300,000-square-foot production facility.

“Great Lakes Veneer is a fifth-generation family-owned business,” says Nick Rogers, Business and Product Development Manager for Great Lakes Veneer. “Throughout the years, we have always focused on helping solve customers’ problems and adding value to their products.”

Rogers adds that they take pride that Wisconsin grows some of the highest-quality hardwoods in North America. And, as they are a large business in a small town, the company contributes to their community by awarding scholarships to students and supporting local non-profits.

When in Wisconsin...

Great Lakes Custom Tool Mfg. Inc.

Great Lakes Custom Tool Mfg. Inc.: Come see how it’s made at Great Lakes Custom Tool.

When in Wisconsin...

Great Lakes Custom Tool Mfg. Inc.: Take a tour of Milwaukee’s historic breweries.

Hardwoods of Wisconsin

ELKHORN

As you might guess by the name, Hardwoods of Wisconsin has been in Wisconsin since its inception in 2005. However, its origins date back to 1955 when Marv Kahle opened Kahle Carpet Company in Dubuque, Iowa. The business grew to offer all kinds of flooring throughout the Midwest, and ultimately transitioned to Wisconsin. Hardwoods of Wisconsin then was led by Marv’s son, Jeff Kahle. As installation contractors, they ended up being more and more involved in the wood production process. They noticed a void that needed to be filled with specialty flooring and realized they could do it on their own, a little at a time.

“We are a third-generation family business in the flooring industry,” says Josh Kahle, President/Owner of Hardwoods of Wisconsin. “We pride ourselves on being flexible and efficient. Our size is our strength because we have the flexibility of a small company, but the scalability of a large company.”

They are known for their custom wide-width, long length European white oak, as well as custom UV finishing, and reclaimed flooring. In Elkhorn, they have about 25,000 feet of space between warehouse, finishing, and manufacturing facilities.

When in Wisconsin...

HARDWOODS OF WISCONSIN:
Go to the Milwaukee Art Museum and see the Calatrava sculpture or stop by the Historic Third Ward. See a baseball game at Miller Park.

Hardwood Floors of Hillsboro, LLC

HILLSBORO

Salena Ball and Kent Barnes officially began Hardwood Floors of Hillsboro in 2007. However, the roots of it began as an installation, sand, and finish company back in 2000. While that venture grew, so did their desire to manufacture high-quality northern hardwood flooring products.

That process now takes place in a 12,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Hillsboro. It’s there that lumber is received and checked for grade, quality, board footage, and moisture prior to being ripped into blanks. And, northern milled strip/plank flooring ultimately is produced, including the northern white oak in three grades that the company is known for.

“Hardwood Floors of Hillsboro is located within 60 miles of the ‘breadBasket’ of some of the finest American Black Walnut on the upper Mississippi River valley corridor,” says Ball, co-owner of Hardwood Floors of Hillsboro. “It has the best dark coloration, second to none!”

When in Wisconsin...

HARDWOOD FLOORS OF HILLSBORO, LLC:
Eat some of the best-tasting and widest variety of cheese in the USA made by the award-winning Carr Valley Cheese company located in Southwest Wisconsin.
Infinity Wood Floors
CRANDON

After seeing an unfilled demand from distributors for high-end unfinished northern products, Infinity Wood Floors began eight years ago. The management team consists of three individuals who have a combined experience of more than 100 years in the flooring business: Mike Baseman, Tom Blakeman, and Pat Tallier.

“Our mission is to enhance our customers’ success by providing the highest-quality precision-machined products, value-added solutions, and an uncompromising focus on customer service,” says Tallier, President of Infinity Wood Floors.

He notes that their signature product is 1st Grade Northern White Hard Maple flooring. At Infinity Wood Floors’ 20,000-square-foot facility, they start by rough surfacing kiln-dried lumber, then it is ripped to width through a scanning system and two dip chain straight line rip saws. Rips are then turned into flooring through a high-precision eight head high-speed flooring machine. It is then end-matched, inspected, and packaged through an in-house nesting system. The flooring is packaged for both domestic and export shipping.

Kwaterski Bros. Wood Products
EAGLE RIVER

For Kwaterski Bros. Wood Products, the business has been all about family from the start. They built a sawmill to provide some of the wood building materials for their family construction firm. In 1979, Mike and Jim Kwaterski’s parents decided to move to Florida, so the brothers purchased the sawmill and attached building. As the economy and home building market were in a free-fall in 1982, they changed the business from a sawmill to a planing mill to produce tongue and groove paneling and flooring.

Kwaterski Bros. eventually moved the business from Three Lakes to Eagle River into a 20,000-square-foot manufacturing and warehouse facility with a showroom. They offer specialty hardwood flooring, and unique textures, including burnished, wire-brushed texture, and lightly scraped time-worn edges.

“We offer a variety of custom hardwood flooring, allowing customers to select from a variety of species,” said Mike Kwaterski, President/Owner of Kwaterski Bros. “We prefinish our floors in-house, and create samples so customers know exactly what stains, colors, and textures will look like on their customized flooring before it goes into production.”

Jim has retired from the business, but the family aspect remains. Mike’s wife, Karla, joined the company, and he’s surrounded by a team that feels like family, too. Kwaterski Bros. supports a number of local events and organizations in the community, including the Three Lakes Center for the Arts, Eagle River Snowmobile Derby, Three Lakes Lions Club, Headwaters Builders Association, Three Eagle Trail, After the War (a local non-profit), and the Northwoods Children’s Museum.

Imperial Blades
SUN PRAIRIE

As a flooring installer, Chris Palmer was tired of the prices he was paying for blades, so he began to make his own in 2009. Eventually, Imperial Blades began marketing and producing more broadly and found a market for having American-made products, as well as their universal fit and titanium coating. The company notes the IBOAT340 is one of their best sellers because of its versatility as a blade on all types of material.

“Imperial Blades is focused on providing high-quality solutions to our core users,” says Tim Rockwell, Director of Sales. “We have a passionate Wisconsin-based team that is focused on innovating and marketing the best oscillating blades in the industry, to save our users time and maximize performance in all their applications.”

Right now, Imperial Blades has about 60 employees and a roughly 22,000-square-foot facility. In January 2020, they broke ground on an expansion of their manufacturing and office facilities that will more than double their footprint in Sun Prairie to 55,000 square feet total and add more than 30 new local jobs.

Oshkosh Designs
WINNECONNE

Oshkosh Designs began in 1991, as Historic Floors of Oshkosh. Back then, Brenda Kubasta, CEO of Oshkosh Designs, explains the premise was to mass-produce a large quantity of a few SKUs of both medallions and borders and sit them on the shelf ready to ship out. Times have changed, though.

“We invent a lot less now because everybody wants it their way,” says Kubasta. “We found our niche in customizing to what the customer actually wants. We have been asked to do some unbelievable projects. I love it when we get a phone call, and, the customer tells us, ‘We’re told you can’t do it. If anyone can, it’s Oshkosh’.”

Kubasta purchased the company in 2011, and their designs are featured in homes and businesses around the world. While it used to be medallions, she says they are now known for parquet and their customization capabilities. In Winneconne, they also are known for community involvement. Kubasta is a village board trustee and believes in giving back, whether it’s building a table for the local fire department or donating products. Oshkosh Designs has also contributed to the NWFA’s efforts with the Gary Sinise Foundation’s R.I.S.E. (Restoring Independence Supporting Empowerment) program, which provides specially adapted smart homes for severely wounded veterans and first responders.

WHEN IN WISCONSIN ...

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Owens Flooring

SHAWANO

Owens Flooring began production in Wisconsin in 2001, after two entrepreneurs who had a door manufacturing business developed a lamination process for engineered hardwood flooring. A few years later, they moved into a facility in Shawano. Manufacturing, finishing, product development, quality testing, customer support, and business management take place on-site.

Owens Flooring’s most popular product is a classic 3/8” White Oak in 4” to 6” widths. They have about 60 employees and manufacture in a 120,000-square-foot plant. The company contributes to Habitat for Humanity and other local organizations.

“Our team is passionate about crafting the best quality flooring for our customers,” says Carrie Barribeau, Sales Operations for Owens Flooring. “It is difficult to describe the commitment of our people, but it is real and it makes the company special.”

Schmidt Custom Floors Inc.

WAUKESHA

In 1968, Robert Schmidt and his wife, Ruth, started a wood flooring company out of their home. Now it’s a third generation family business run by their son, Tim Schmidt. Schmidt Custom Floors Inc. is based in Waukesha and recently increased its presence in Wisconsin with the opening of a new 10,000-square-foot design showroom in Madison this spring.

“We are known for ‘Crafting Beautiful Naturally’ – finding the perfect look and floor for your family lifestyle,” explains Andrea Schmidt, Showroom/Product Manager for Schmidt Custom Floors. “We have designers on staff and processes that make business easy.”

The Schmidt Custom Floors team includes about 150 people. The company hosts an annual golf outing to benefit the Make-A-Wish Foundation, and they contribute to charitable causes such as DAWS (Gigi’s House) and the American Heart Association, to name a few.

WHEN IN WISCONSIN ...

Schmidt Custom Floors Inc.

WHEN IN WISCONSIN ...

Owens Flooring

WHEN IN WISCONSIN ...

WD Flooring

LAONA

When WD Flooring began in 1996, Peter Connor, president of the company, says there were mainly Oak Strip and Maple Strip manufacturers in the flooring world. They seized an opportunity to create products from a variety of hardwoods in all different widths.

WD Flooring takes pride in its innovation and breadth of products. They’ve won several NWFA Wood Floor of the Year awards and have completed projects in places such as the Detroit Institute of Arts, the National Gallery of Latvia, the Country Music Hall of Fame, and the Frank Gehry-Designed Weisman Art Museum, to name a few. With more than 750 products, Connor says it is tough to choose one signature product, but long, wide, and precise is their calling card.

“We have 120 employees on a 400-acre plant site and are the only truly fully integrated mill in Wisconsin,” explains Connor. “It’s the only place where you can see a tree get cut, travel with it to the sawmill, then on to the flooring mills to be produced into solid or engineered and/or unfinished or prefinished flooring.”

The Connor family has been in Laona since 1898, and in the wood industry since 1872. They also have the Camp Five Logging Museum in the community, which is dedicated to the forest products industry. The company’s name is a tribute to Peter Connor’s great-grandfather, W.D. Connor, a pioneer of sustainable forestry and a member of the Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame. WD Flooring also has contributed to the NWFA’s efforts with the Gary Sinise Foundations R.I.S.E. (Restoring Independence Supporting Empowerment) program, which provides specially adapted smart homes for severely wounded veterans and first responders.

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Owens Flooring

WHEN IN WISCONSIN ...

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Schmidt Custom Floors Inc.

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WD Flooring

WHEN IN WISCONSIN ...

Snow Country Hardwoods Inc.

HURLEY

Snow Country Hardwoods started 25 years ago as an off-shoot of Snowbelt Hardwoods. Known for White Hard Maple and Northern Red Oak, the company manufactures 100 percent of its products at the facility in Northern Wisconsin. That’s done by 38 employees, plus support from sister companies Snowbelt Hardwoods, Snow Ridge Lumber, Snow Timber Pellets, and Snow Run Trucking.

“Our intention always has been to make a high-end hardwood floor, which we continue to do to this day,” says John Hilgemann, VP of Snow Country Hardwoods, noting that their signature product is hard maple.

Snow Country Hardwoods Inc.

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