



Mary Murrell

meets



Lee Fox

Lee Fox, director of Oxden Floors in Kent, is not one to let the recession get him down:

FULL of determination, Lee says: 'We can all sit and moan about the credit crunch, but that won't make it any better. We have to be pro-active, get off our backsides and make it happen'.

Oxden Floors celebrated its 30th anniversary this year, having been set up by Lee's father, Chris, in 1978.

When Chris Fox retired two years ago, Lee, who had been involved in the company for nine years, took it over with his co-director Steve Hobbs.

'Originally I wasn't destined for this job, as my father made it clear I should make my own career. I became a quantity surveyor, a skill that proved to be very useful when I eventually joined the company.'

'In the last two years we have streamlined our operations. Turnover has increased from £500,000 in 2001 to £2.5m currently, partly due to a sharper focus on market conditions, but mostly to enthusiasm and sheer hard work.'

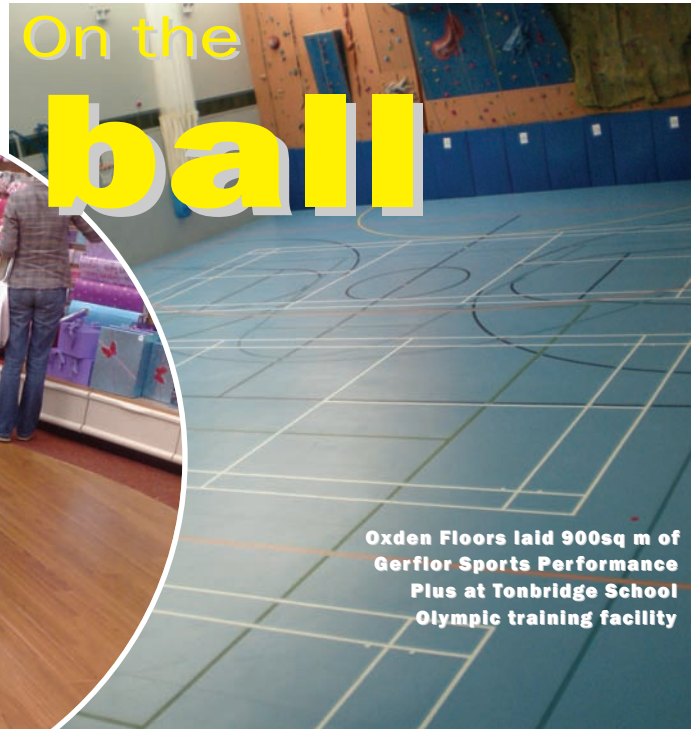
Lee and Steve handle all stages of all of the contracts. Emma Woodcock, who has been with the company for 13 years, is the accounts manager while Lauren Greenwood is the admin assistant.

Four full-time fitters are assisted by several sub-contractors. All have CSCS cards and have been security checked to work in sensitive



Flooring laid by Oxden Floors at Clinton Cards, Bluewater Shopping Centre

On the ball



Oxden Floors laid 900sq m of Gerflor Sports Performance Plus at Tonbridge School Olympic training facility

locations such as schools and prisons.

'Together we all make an effective team, an absolute must for success,' says Lee.

The company supplies and installs mainly carpet, vinyl, rubber, linoleum, sports floors and accessories from a wide range of manufacturers and distributors. Border work and on-site hand cutting of inlaid patterns can be undertaken.

Wood and laminate are not a major part of the company's portfolio, but can be laid when part of a project. Much of the work undertaken is for local authorities and main contractors.

'We have framework agreements with several main contractors. As

one of a group of preferred partners, even if our initial estimate is slightly higher than that of a competitor we are given the opportunity to negotiate to try to secure the contract.

'A good relationship with specifiers is essential to give us an early foot in the door.'

'To ensure we are one of the first contractors on the scene we have invested several thousand pounds in a database which gives us access to information about current and future construction projects in the southeast of England.'

'As this is updated every hour we check it several times a day. It is a comprehensive system which gives full details of projects together with the names of the main contractors, architects, quantity surveyors, specifiers, etc.'

'It is proving to be a cost effective way of researching projects of particular interest to us,' says Lee.

'We are fortunate as we have been extremely busy with Schools for the Future projects and Kent Better Homes care homes contracts under PFI schemes. We have already secured 25% of our 2009 turnover.'

'So far we haven't seen tougher times, although a few contracts have been postponed. Neither have we experienced any payment problems. We have a two tier approach. Emma reminds people in advance when payments are due, and if the money is not received a director makes contact.'

'I think the danger will come if there is a price war fuelled by clients asking ridiculous prices or sub-contractors working purely for turnover. We are reluctant to walk away from any job, but work needs to be profitable to maintain standards.'

'Fortunately our overheads are quite low as we own all our vans and our premises, which helps us to be competitive.'

Oxden Floors joined the CFA in 1990. 'We have always received help from the Association when we needed it. Its good to know the CFA is just a phone call away,' says Lee.

'Support from manufacturers and distributors is also essential to our success as we rely on stock availability and their service to us,' says Lee.

'Area sales reps don't visit so often now, but they do regularly ring or send emails. That's fine as long as they keep us up to date with their product range. Even in difficult times, we must not be afraid to give new products a go.'

'I love my job. I like working with different people, and being able to finish from a job, knowing it has been well done. I even enjoy the hassles of problem solving!'

'We are positive about 2009, because we know we will adapt to market conditions. There is no reason why we shouldn't go on for another 30 years!' **CFJ**

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Freudenberg Uni rubber sheet flooring at Discovery School, Kings Hill, Kent, laid by Oxden Floors