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2008 INNOVATORS
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Top 5 Challenges for 2008
Selling in a Down Market

Classic Remodeling & Construction President
Bob Fleming

2008 Innovators

**FIVE COMPANIES
WITH A DIFFERENT
TAKE ON BUSINESS**

By Jonathan Sweet, Senior Editor

Last year was one of transition for the remodeling industry from a market of soaring growth to one where many companies struggled to maintain those highs. With more of the same likely for 2008, companies that find the most innovative ways to improve their businesses will be the most likely to succeed in a challenging market. The five companies on the following pages have come up with ways to separate themselves from the crowd by implementing practices that improve their companies and the industry. For extended profiles of the 2008 Innovators, visit www.ProRemodeler.com.

Bob Fleming is president of Classic Remodeling & Construction in Johns Island, S.C., a trustee of the American College of the Building Arts.

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PHOTO: MILTON MORRIS

Bob Fleming

What makes Bob Fleming an Innovator? Fleming has devoted time and resources to the planning and growth of The American College of the Building Arts, the first four-year college dedicated to the construction industry.

ASK REMODELERS what their biggest challenge is and they inevitably say it's finding good employees. A group of construction professionals in South Carolina is trying to address that problem while simultaneously producing well-rounded students through The American College of the Building Arts.

“We all complain about there not being enough qualified people out there,” says remodeler Bob Fleming, president of Classic Remodeling & Construction in Johns Island, S.C. “This is a chance to do something about it.”

Fleming is a member of the college's board of trustees and is in charge of structural planning and facilities for the school. He first got involved with the Charleston, S.C. college when his company helped sponsor a fundraiser for what was then known as the School of the Building Arts as it was trying to get started. In 2004, the school began recruiting students and changed its name to The American College of the Building Arts.

What makes the college different from other construction schools is its four-year education in traditional subjects such as

English, math and business along with construction skills. That curriculum makes it easier for the future construction employees to work with clients.

“My employees have college degrees, and that makes it much easier for them to communicate with the high-end clients we have to deal with,” Fleming says.

The students spend half the day in class and the other half in the studio and field. Students also work as apprentices with local construction companies. The program is modeled after construction schools in Europe, most notably the Les Compagnons du Devoir in France.

“There, before people go into construc-

tion, they go into an apprenticeship,” Fleming says. “Here, we don't teach them anymore. We just put them out in a pickup truck and say, ‘You're a carpenter.’”

The college currently has 40 students, with an expected enrollment of 60 to 70 next year. The first class is scheduled to graduate in 2009.

Until then, the college won't receive accreditation from the U.S. Department of Education, which means students can't get government loans to cover tuition or other expenses. Because of that, the college has been heavily discounting the \$18,000 a year tuition and relying on donations and a \$3.2 million federal grant it received in 2004 to cover costs.

“The future is a serious concern,” Fleming says. “Will it still be here a few years down the road? We've got a powerful board, and they're going to do everything they can to make sure we make it.”

The college's other major challenge has been finding a permanent home. The school started out in the old Charleston city jail, but quickly outgrew that location. Currently, it operates out of the old Charleston Naval Base that is being redeveloped by the Noiset Co.

The college recently purchased the 38-acre McLeod Plantation, a historic site across the Ashley River from downtown Charleston. The students of the college will restore the main house, outbuildings and grounds to its former state. The plantation not only offers a place for the students to improve their skills but will eventually become the home the college has been searching for, Fleming says.

Classic Remodeling & Construction

Location: Johns Island, S.C.

Years in business: 18

Employees: 39

Type of work: Design/build remodeling

2007 revenue: \$7 million

www.classicremodeling.com