

# Make room for MegaCera USA

## American/Chinese joint venture eyes domestic opportunities

By Lesley Goddin

There's a new ceramic player in town, and its name is MegaCera.

But this upstart operation has tapped some high-caliber talent. Mike Connor, former Laufen CEO, has joined with two partners to establish the firm, which can be described as a joint venture designed to bring Chinese tile to the American market.

Connor left Laufen after the company's acquisition by Spanish tile producer Roca. Following his departure, he built a relationship with Alfred Chan, principal of Hong Kong-based MegaCera, a trading company that historically traded Chinese tile primarily to Pacific Rim countries; he also partnered with Ken Reardon, another U.S. industry member.

MegaCera USA, headquartered

in Tulsa, Okla., will manage all transactions. "We will Americanize the process and handle the complexity of dealing with the Chinese," Connor told *FCW*. "We will inspect for quality and make sure product gets to the port on time."

Chan has relationships with more than 30 Chinese tile factories as well as banks and other resources for export business from China to the Pacific Rim. Connor and Reardon will tap into those resources to supply the U.S.

"To do business over there you need to have a partner on the

ground that is watching out for your interest and making sure what was committed to is happening," Connor said. "Our game plan is to give customers access to Chinese capacity with great value: ceramic wall-floor combinations, through-body and glazed porcelains and mosaics."

Connor believes China has a lot to offer the U.S., especially to West Coast companies, due to the logistical advantage over product imported from Europe. "China's production capacity is more than 13 billion square feet — more than Italy and Spain put together," he said, adding that factories are relatively new, having been built in the last 10 to 15 years. "Plus, the Chinese have some of the best raw ma-

terials in the world in terms of natural porcelain."

Add to that the stable currency exchange at a time when the Euro is beating down the U.S. dollar, and there is a powerful case for the infusion of Chinese product into the U.S. market. "China will be a major supply source to the U.S.," Connor said.

The first step Connor identified is developing product suited for U.S. tastes. "We need to Americanize production with quality and service to supply U.S. customers," he said. "We have formed the company and started the process, but we have a lot more to do."

MegaCera will provide distributors, existing brands and suppliers with product for their lines — not create a MegaCera brand in itself. Nor is selling directly to retailers part of the business plan.

"Many U.S. manufacturers and suppliers are not actually making what is sold under their name," Connor said. "We will source from China for distributors and suppliers who don't carry Chinese tile."

MegaCera USA will open its Tulsa office in May. For more information, call (918) 743-6737 or e-mail [mpctulsa@aol.com](mailto:mpctulsa@aol.com). **FCW**



## Tile of Spain

*The Mark of Excellence*

Throughout history, artists like Spain's Joan Miró have added new dimensions to their unique works with the creative use of ceramic tile. Like Miró, the tile manufacturers of Spain are regarded as masters of their craft. For centuries, they have combined a history of craftsmanship and quality with forward-thinking technologies.

Today, Spain leads the world in the production of ceramic tile. It continues to set industry standards, developing the techniques and products of the future, from handmade to high-tech.

## news bites

- **Georgia Marble** appointed Tom Brann its new independent architectural representative in Wisconsin and Illinois. Currently, Brann is president of Tom Brann & Associates in Chicago. With partner Raelene Robertson, Brann brings to Georgia Marble a strong background in the tile and stone industry