



Edina law firm's remodel is a work of art

Article by: Patrick Kennedy
Star Tribune
March 23, 2014 - 9:24 AM

The building at 7401 Metro Blvd. in Edina is one of several built in the 1980s that feature the era's familiar concrete-and-glass construction. And it's a safe bet that much of the interior office space in those buildings retains an '80s vibe as well.

An exception would be the law firm of O'Meara Leer Wagner & Kohl, which recently completed a smart-office remodel for the more than 50-person law firm, one of Minnesota's leading civil litigation firms.

But the remodel was far more than cosmetic. The office has become a reflection of the firm's values: new conference rooms show commitment to its clients; redesigned work spaces emphasize teamwork and collaboration, and works of art by artists with developmental disabilities offer a visible reminder of the firm's commitment to community service.

Managing Partner Shamus O'Meara said he looked at all available options as the firm's lease on the top floor of the office building was set to expire.

"The remodel was part of a renegotiated 10-year lease," O'Meara said. "We were able to negotiate a favorable build-out allowance as part of it."

Stepping off the elevator on the sixth floor, visitors are greeted by a large open reception area. To the left is one conference room and to the right are two more conference and mediation rooms fronted by partially frosted glass that offer privacy but also allow in light. The locations of the conference rooms were consciously chosen to lessen anxiety of visitors.

O'Meara said he didn't want to parade visitors and prospective clients through a warren of offices and cubicles before settling in. The idea was to let visitors see right away where they would likely be spending their time and to allow work in the internal office area to continue without interruption.

'Candid, sensitive discussions'

Angela Parker, president of the Minnesota chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers, said the redesign makes sense. Parker, who was not involved in the redesign, said the increasing use of cellphones and electronic devices actually makes conference rooms more important as places to hold candid and sensitive discussions.

"It's crucial in the work environment to have that conference room where we can meet in private, talk in private," Parker said. "I think there is a return to that because everybody is so mobile."

The law firm asked Partnership Resources, a St. Louis Park-based nonprofit, to help with the decorating.

The nonprofit teams with the Walker Art Center to provide a high-quality learning experience for artists with developmental disabilities and works with them to create original works of art. The Partnerships program allows the artists to show their abilities, lets them express themselves and provides some income opportunities.

Those works of art are on display in the firm's common areas.

"It really blew people's minds with what I can do with my own brain and art," said Richard Brown at the firm's February meet-the-artists event.

Brown, 66, has cerebral palsy and was institutionalized for years at the former state hospital in Faribault. Several of his works are on display at the firm.

O'Meara said the art "is a reflection of our outreach to communities that need a helping hand."

Dilbert-style cubicles are out

The new space also allows the firm to work better and smarter. The internal office overhaul did away with high-walled cubicles and outdated furnishings. The new space has a more welcoming professional services look with contemporary fabrics and colors that fit the firm's image.

Some offices were removed, which brought in more light, and some of the new window spaces went to paralegals. The office and furniture solutions were a key part of the design goals to create more teamwork and collaboration.

Dan Ryan, an account executive with Henricksen, a provider of office furniture with offices in Minneapolis, helped the firm with new furniture selections that were central to the overall design goals.

"They are going to be able to learn from each other in that open environment," Ryan said. "Yet with the glass and ergonomic tools they've added, they should be able to increase productivity and task work."

The firm also was able to negotiate a new lunchroom and meeting space on the fifth floor as well as a new rent-free training facility wired for teleconferencing adjacent to the lunchroom.



Tom Shamla stood by his painting of Joe Mauer during a meet-the-artist event at the O'Meara Leer Wagner & Kohl law offices in Edina.

Bruce Bisping, Star Tribune



Dale Thornsjo, Kris Anderson Ryan, Shamus O'Meara and Tim Leer held their favorite office art pieces made by Partnership Resources artists.

Courtney Perry, Special to the Star Tribune

The remodel also accommodates the firm's growth plan. The firm, which has more than 50 employees, including 22 attorneys, recently hired two attorneys and plans to add two more this spring and additional professionals this summer.

"We were able to get a good, usable, interactive space at a price we could afford, and with room for growth," O'Meara said.

Rick Graf, a real estate broker with CBRE in Bloomington, helped negotiate the firm's new lease.

The key to getting a good deal, he said, is a willingness to check out the market to see what is available and bringing competing offers to his clients.

"Shamus' real negotiating leverage was his ability to find other spaces that would work," Graf said.

Patrick Kennedy • 612-673-7926

© 2014 Star Tribune