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Metro Hartford: Ready for Changing workforce - Changing space

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In 2007, William Draves and Julie Coates released their book *Nine Shift* and I had the pleasure of hearing him speak about the societal change that is occurring - one not dissimilar to how we moved from an agrarian society to an industrial society. He presented the case where there will be a shift in how we spend 75% of our waking time - those nine hours of our day.

Where the automobile was the major influencing force in our past societal change, then facilitating the move from urban to suburban, it is not difficult to see how the Internet is today's vehicle in facilitating workforce and workplace change.

Within just three short years, the change is visible. Companies are reducing and repurposing their real estate footprint to yield greater economic, productive and sustainable/ "green" benefits. The rise of the remote workforce has created access to an expanded global labor market and I believe the role of the economic developer is even more important today in bridging community needs and business needs but that's another article!

Let's just look at our insurance sector. Our Hartford region is blessed with solid and invested corporate citizens. Just last week, UnitedHealthcare officially opened its new 18-floor, 450,000 s/f office at CityPlace I in downtown Hartford. Since the 38-story tower was built in the early '80s, this was the most extensive renovation to date. The more than \$35 million transformation was the product of numerous employee surveys and input to create a light filled, health conscious, productive workplace to retain their 2,100 employees and attract those of the future. But, as delighted as any community would be to see such reinvestment - huddle space, fitness center, high definition Cisco telepresence rooms, UnitedHealthcare looked at their space as not only as an asset to attracting and retaining talent but as an asset to the community. They have opened the new healthy menu cafeteria to the community along with dedicated conference rooms that UnitedHealthcare said it plans to make available to its non-profit partners. Mike Matteo, CEO of UnitedHealthcare National Accounts said, "We saw this relocation as the potential to be more than bricks and mortar. Relocating to the heart of the CBD will put more feet on the street and let us play a major role in the revitalization of downtown Hartford. We're more than just a health care partner; we're looking to be a good community partner too." And how do their employees feel? "Seeing what an active interest UnitedHealthcare takes in its employees, as well as the communities it serves, is a significant part of why I look forward to coming to work every day," said Kristen Roy, a Hartford-based employee who has been with the company four years."

Young professionals are finding the move to more flexible space very attractive. Julie Daly who manages the MetroHartford Alliance's HYPE program (Hartford Young Professionals and Entrepreneurs) said, "With a philosophy that 'life is more than work,' young professionals are not the typical 'nine-to-five workers' nor do they plan to be in the same job for thirty years like their parents.

When employers allow flexibility, they feel trusted by the generation of older managers. They trust your work and make you want to perform better."

Aetna clearly has been ahead of this curve with more than one-third of their workforce now working remotely. This workforce change to home based teleworkers, mobile workers as well as conventional workers has necessitated the redefinition of "going to the office." Different types of activity settings were created to accommodate space for conferencing or space to concentrate; conventional office or open collaborative space; and there are even shared work spaces to put together a proposal.

Aetna's significant investment in changing their "space" has all been with an eye toward sustainability. They believe that creating sustainable workspaces through the use of green products and practices is no longer a desired state; it must happen. From solar panels to state-of-the-art technology such as a wireless campus, conference rooms to electronically share and modify presentations, sophisticated audio conference phones, it was not surprising that Aetna earned the Connecticut Climate Change Leadership Award in 2009. And while the company has been going green to help the environment, we were pleased to see some of that "green" going to the many local contractors Aetna hired to complete its campus-wide renovations. Karen Odum, senior strategic planner for Aetna, sums it up, "Aetna's workforce now spans three generations with very different ways of working and expectations of the office. Definition of where and when you work varies widely. Telework, mobile workers and the technological capability to work anytime and anywhere has hit an all time high." And this approach is being implemented beyond the U.S.

The Hartford, ING, Travelers and the list can go on of the many companies in the region that are also adapting to the changing workforce and changing workspace. And, with AT&T's continual upgrading of its robust infrastructure, an investment approaching \$1 billion just in the last two years, the Hartford region stands ready to accommodate the data intensive applications for today and tomorrow.

Sandra Johnson, EDP, is vice president and director of business development for the MetroHartford Alliance.

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540