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Project of the Month: Northeast Arc, Phase Zero Design and MRG bring new life to Liberty Tree Mall

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Danvers, MA Phase Zero Design partnered in a design / build delivery with MRG Construction on Northeast Arc's newest facility. Located inside the Liberty Tree Mall, the not-for-profit Northeast Arc is one of the country's largest and oldest chapters of Arc, a nationwide network, providing lifelong opportunities for intellectually and developmentally disabled and their families. The Arc is focused on unlocking potential in people with disabilities.

The new 26,000 s/f, Center for Linking Lives brings community facing programs and training from skills development, career advising to residential and living support within the headquarters. Northeast Arc's vision was to create an engaging, collaborative, inviting space to better support the community they serve. Locating the facility in a high traffic, traditionally retail environment, allows for higher visibility of the organization and their contribution to the community. Mall goers are able to get a glimpse of the work the Arc does and shop in their retail store, Parcels, which sells products created by people with disabilities.

"The team proved to be great listeners as we defined our culture, services and space needs. They efficiently and effectively summarized our vision of an engaging and flexible space into a complete design. Our business and space needs changed dramatically during the buildout as a result of the pandemic. Phase Zero's team was able to recommend and implement short-term and long-term solutions while being conscientious of budget constraints," said Tim Brown, executive director of Northeast Arc.

The design intent of the project was to create a vibrant, resilient space, focused around flexibility as the services and community evolve. The project boasts brightly colored walls and vibrant wall graphics that enforce Northeast Arc's philosophy. With innovation at its core, the space has several flexible collaboration areas for shared work space, a communal kitchen for cooking classes and food prep, and an innovation lab designed to encourage big picture thinking with the Arc's high-functioning autistic population. The environment encourages synergy and collaboration among different departments and eliminates barriers between employees and members with openness, flexible furniture and layout, and the use of glass throughout the space.

"Working with Northeast Arc was such a pleasure. Making their vision come to life for a vibrant, innovative space was an exciting and collaborative process. With a background in retail, our firm enjoyed working on changing the use within a mall environment. We will continue to see more of this trend," said Robyn Kiernan, project architect.

The colorful, unique space is a bit of a departure from the former children's clothing store that once stood in Liberty Tree Mall. Malls are undergoing a rebirth, but can still remain a hub for the community. By bringing Northeast Arc's Center for Linking Lives into a public, high traffic mall space allows for the normalization of the work they do and encourages the public to interact with their members. The space is focused around bringing people with cognitive disabilities to their full potential.