



Unorthodox use of offices challenges status quo

# Physical spaces generate inspiring results

Our traditional image of office space is being challenged by some beautiful and innovative physical spaces. Perhaps even more impressive are the novel ways that companies are putting these spaces to work.

At Globalive Communications Corp.'s downtown Toronto corporate headquarters, for example, the company has apportioned space simply for community giving. Globalive's founder and CEO Anthony Lacavera says this contemporary office space, complete with a 2,500-square-foot outdoor patio, is being offered to local charities to host their fundraising events.

Globalive's philanthropic arm is called Shamba – the name of both the foundation and the space.

Shamba means "farm" in Swahili, and the concept for the Shamba Foundation is to mobilize business networks in an urban farm of sorts, where many hands make light work.

The recipients of that work are charities and non-profit organizations who can use the

Shamba Space as a zero-cost event venue to raise fundraising dollars.

All costs are covered, including personnel, drinks and food, through both Globalive and its partner sponsors. Globalive operates YAK Communications – providing home phone, high-speed Internet and long distance services to Ontario, B.C. and Quebec.

"A number of Globalive team members donate their time to greet guests or engage as servers during the events," says Mr. Lacavera. "I've always wanted Globalive to give back in a meaningful way that truly involved the team instead of it being a more passive thing."

The funky, 12th-storey space has a fun, warm, engaging feel, complete with urban chic furniture, a phenomenal audio-visual system, a bar and a very large outdoor grill.

Organizations ranging from Little Geeks, a Toronto-based charity that collects, refurbishes and redistributes donated home computers to children in need, to Habitat

for Humanity have raised over \$100,000 since the patio opened in July 2007. A single Shamba Night can command anywhere from a few thousand to tens of thousands in one night alone.

From one hive of activity to another, Karo Group, a successful Calgary-based branding

agency, has a community of another sort on its second-storey rooftop space – bees.

"We have three hives up there," says Chris Bedford, president and CEO of Karo Group, "and produced about 150 jars of honey last year."

Mr. Bedford credits the idea to former staff member

Rudy Gelderblom, who still returns twice a year to set up the hives (which he stores during the off season) and help with the extraction of the honey.

"We have an open and supportive culture and if someone has a passion like that, we usually take the approach:

"Sure. Let's give it a go," he says.

Going into their third year of producing "Rooftop Honey," Karo employees get involved in a variety of different ways. A handful help maintain the bees, which are apparently quite low maintenance. Most, however, get involved by buying honey futures.

"It's very fun. Certain people try to monopolize and you see e-mails flying around that so-and-so is trying to get a corner on the honey market," says Mr. Bedford. "It creates good fun and banter."

He says he likes the metaphor the bees serve for Karo. "If you ever observe a beehive, it appears to be chaos, yet, somehow in the middle of that, they produce these perfect, magnificent structures. Our business is like that; people, computers, meetings and activity and at the end of it all, a product comes out of it, somehow. It happens without being obvious from just observing the activity of the people." ■



Globalive Communications Corp. CEO Anthony Lacavera says the company offers the 2,500-square-foot outdoor patio of its downtown Toronto corporate headquarters to local charities to host their fundraising events. Since it opened in July 2007, charities have raised over \$100,000 on the patio. "I've always wanted Globalive to give back in a meaningful way," says Mr. Lacavera.

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

## Employers find green initiatives boost workplace performance

Imagine how well Canada would be doing in reducing its environmental footprint if every business in the country became carbon neutral.

That's just what Environics Communications Inc. is doing. The Toronto-based public relations company is working with The Pembina Institute on a carbon audit of its operations, and plans to be carbon neutral by this summer.

"We'll review their report, and follow their recommendations as to how we can reduce our carbon footprint," says Bruce MacLellan, president of Environics. "It's not possible to be 100 per cent carbon neutral, so we will purchase gold standard carbon offsets for the remaining amounts."

Mr. MacLellan embarked on meeting his goal to become the greenest PR agency in North America in mid-2007, and says it isn't always easy being green.

"It's a case where supply has not yet caught up with

demand," he says, remarking on how difficult it was to find a green caterer so the company could reduce its amount of waste.

It's not easy, and it's also not cheap.

Environics' power costs increased by 10 to 15 per cent when the company switched to Bullfrog Power – a leading power provider of 100 per cent green electricity.

As well, the company pays 40 per cent more for its 100 per cent recycled paper, bought through Quebec-based Cascades Inc., than it would for non-recycled paper, a cost that Environics has offset by reducing its paper use by 33 per cent (it has gone double sided).

"We are willing to pay more to be green, because it's the responsible thing to do," says Mr. MacLellan, adding that this philosophy fits well with his very environmentally aware and concerned mid-30s workforce of 100 employees.

"It's three cheers from them," he says. "They are all proud to be working at a company that would do this."

That has been the case at Karo Group as well.

President and CEO Chris Bedford, based in Calgary, says his branding agency has been better able to attract employees whose values are aligned with Karo's. "This gives you some tangible ways to have a conversation about values even during the interview process. If it isn't their thing, it's evident. If it is, it's equally as evident," says Mr. Bedford.

A popular and well-used environmental initiative of Karo's is its smart cars – one at its Calgary office and one at its Vancouver office. "They are used constantly," says Mr. Bedford. "Because they are available to everybody on staff, the cars allow them, if they don't have a car or don't want to commute in a car, to have the ability to book the

car for business or personal use, 24-7."

Another way Karo employees are offered alternatives is through the company's bike-friendly environment.

"We have a couple of mountain bikes that people can book, and we encourage that for a variety of reasons. We're very close to the pathways, and biking is a healthy thing

to do. It can also be just as productive to grab the bikes and ride down to the river for a meeting," says Mr. Bedford, adding that employees who bring their own bikes to work can store them in the company's bike storage area.

On top of some faithful recycling practices, Karo also gets involved in environmental

stewardship through its work.

"We get behind a lot of different organizations. Last year, for example, we donated a significant amount of our time to Climate Change Central and built them a new website," says Mr. Bedford. "Our employees felt good about getting behind a cause that had such a strong environmental mandate." ■



Karo Group employees like CFO Joe Strasser use the company's smart cars to get around Vancouver and Calgary, and help demonstrate the company's interest in the environment. PHOTO: SUPPLIED



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Best practice profiles

### More innovative spaces

**The PEER Group Inc.'s** office space has been set up to provide gallery-like settings to allow employees to exhibit their art as well as the artwork of their spouses and children.

**TD Bank Financial Group** has a Workplace Accommodation Policy (WAP) that outlines TD's commitment to accommodation and a barrier-free workplace. There is a dedicated Accommodation Fund for deploying tools and

facilities that employees with disabilities need to do their jobs such as sign language interpreters, large screen monitors and changes to chairs and desks.

**Urban Systems Ltd.** recently acquired another floor for its head office and asked employees to form teams and present their ideas on how to best organize the new and existing floor space. The proposals were then presented to

the architectural firm responsible for the redesign for incorporation into the final plan.

**AdFarm's** office decor is very popular among staff, and it attracts visitors. It symbolizes the rural environment and is therefore a physical embodiment of AdFarm's brand. Adfarm Calgary recently appeared on Citytv Calgary in a segment called "Cool Spaces." ■