

WHY DID PEO CROSS THE STREET?

Securing a LEED-certified, state-of-the-art association headquarters was a key step in PEO's vision of becoming the world leader in engineering self-regulation. The move was also aimed at showcasing the engineering profession.

By Sharon Aschalek



1. PEO's custom-made reception desk
2. Multi-functional meeting space on the ground floor
3. Tribunals hearing room on the seventh floor

A more functional, collaborative and environmentally sustainable work environment are the highlights of PEO's newly renovated headquarters, which came to fruition this fall after several years of planning and hard work by PEO's 40 Sheppard Task Force and by engineering, architecture and interior design firms to achieve the association's goal of developing a space it could proudly call the home of the global leader in professional self-regulation.

The larger and more modern headquarters, located just steps from the Sheppard subway station at 40 Sheppard Avenue West in Toronto, is loaded with sophisticated features and amenities that will contribute to a more practical and welcoming workspace for PEO council members, staff and volunteers, better reflect the association's professionalism and purpose to members as well as the broader engineering community, and demonstrate the specialized expertise and essential value of professional engineering to the public.

"Our new building is a vast improvement over our old one in that we have much more space, updated facilities, current technologies, more open and flexible work stations and more access to sunlight, all of which create a much more enjoyable place to work and allow for better productivity," says Scott Clark, LLB, PEO's chief administrative officer, who oversaw the project. "At the same time, it's

a landmark that's befitting of the engineering profession, and I think licence holders will be proud to see that this is where the profession is governed."

Walking past the sleek and spacious lobby and up to the top four floors PEO partially occupies in the eight-floor building, what first impresses are the beautiful dark blue and grey interiors, pervasive glass walls and ample, airy space. But a closer look reveals that the beauty of PEO's new headquarters runs far below the surface. Going from 33,000 square feet at the old offices at 25 Sheppard Ave. W. to 38,000 sq. ft. now—and to 52,000 sq. ft. in 2015, once the leases for some current tenants expire—has allowed PEO to tackle its long-time problem of insufficient meeting space. The current facilities feature multiple meeting rooms in a variety of sizes to make it easier for PEO councillors, staff and volunteers to conduct business. Suite 104, a multi-functional meeting space on the ground floor, is furnished with mobile, flip-top modular meeting tables to accommodate up to 44 people in a variety of seating configurations, and has an ultra low-profile raised access floor that allows for easy reconfiguration of power, voice and data, as well as state-of-the-art audiovisual technology, a refreshment centre and an adjoining beautifully landscaped terrace for outdoor breaks.

AMPLE, VARIED MEETING SPACE

Acoustical separation features allowing for greater privacy can be found in the seventh-floor Experience Requirements Committee (ERC) interview rooms and tribunals hearing room, the latter of which also features a raised access floor. The same sound and flooring attributes can be found in the top floor interim council chamber/multi-purpose meeting room, which can seat 60 people in a table configuration and perimeter seating and 100 in a theatre-style format. By 2015, this floor will expand to a full conference facility with permanent council chamber, additional committee rooms, business lounge and a larger dining facility than the current one.

In each division on the fifth and sixth floors populated by most staff are "collaboration rooms" to allow for on-

- 4. Staff kitchen on the fifth floor
- 5. Collaboration room on the fifth floor
- 6. Filing and storage area for staff
- 7. Beverage centre in the tribunals area



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the-spot meetings for small groups. On the main floor, meanwhile, is a volunteer meeting room/business centre where volunteers can access the Internet or engage with other volunteers before or after committee meetings, and licence applicants can complete forms.

“What we have done is create a series of different meeting environments, including some that are multi-functional, to make it easier to get work done, and to provide the flexibility to use these rooms in a variety of ways,” says Lesley Melliship, senior associate, Intercede Facility Management Ltd., the interior design firm for the renovation.

Begun with PEO’s move across the street in late 2009, the renovation has resulted in more pleasant and user-friendly work spaces for staff. In keeping with current and more progressive office design trends, the open work areas hug the perimeter of the building, allowing sunlight to flood the entire floor, including the windowed-offices around the interior of each floor. Ergonomic and larger-than-average 20-ft. by 20-ft. four-workstation desk pods feature lower cubicle walls to make it easier for staff to interact with each other. At the same time, staff needing to address personal matters may make calls in new privacy rooms. Most printers are now housed in rooms with a high level of acoustic separation. The use of moveable walls for offices makes it possible to quickly and easily reconfigure office spaces as needed.

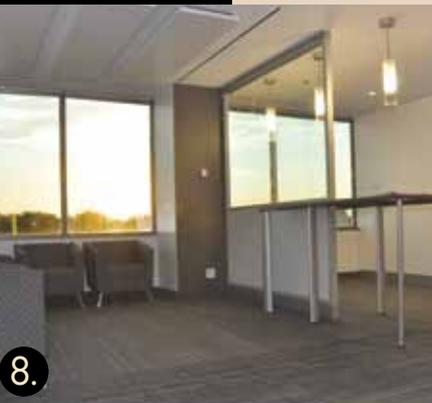
The quality of the working environment on all four floors has also been enhanced through the inclusion of

comfortable and convenient eating spaces. A large, glass-walled dining space on the eighth floor provides staff and council members the chance to step away from their desks to have lunch together; the attached servery enables the hosting of lunch meetings. “Lunch bars” or eating lounges equipped with soft seats, as well as high counters with stools on each of the staff floors, were included as places to take breaks or meet with visitors.

UPGRADED IT AND MECHANICAL

A significant investment was made to upgrade the building’s IT and telephone systems, so that all PEO-occupied areas feature wireless Internet access as well as Voice Over IP (VOIP) technology. The building’s wireless services are complemented by an enhanced Virtual Private Network (VPN) facility, so that staff working remotely can access the PEO computing environment. Advanced web and video conferencing technologies and audiovisual services were implemented and will continue to be updated to optimize meeting spaces. Currently, some meeting rooms are equipped with large LCD screens, high resolution projectors, Brightlink interactive projectors, integrated microphone and teleconferencing capability, uplift microphone technology, audio and video recording capability and one-touch room setting adjustability to control lighting, projection and sun exposure.

In keeping with PEO’s objective of developing a LEED-certified building (read about the full range of eco-friendly



8. Lunch bar on one of the staff floors
 9. Open-concept staff area
 10. Dining space and servery on the eighth floor

features of the new headquarters in the story “Creating a beacon of sustainability” on page 53), the association chose to replace the building’s outdated HVAC facilities with a more modern system that would provide higher levels of energy efficiency, improve indoor air quality and ventilation, and have a longer life cycle with lower maintenance costs.

“What PEO has now is one of the most proven HVAC systems that can address sustainable building standards. It will provide superior filtration and measured quantities of ventilation for each floor at levels that are in line with what current generation technologies and good practice would dictate,” says Phil Bastow, P.Eng., vice president and partner, The Mitchell Partnership, which implemented the new system.

In keeping with its focus on building efficiency, PEO hired BLJC, Canada’s leading facility management services company, to provide guidance on and continue to ensure energy-efficient and sustainable operating practices throughout the facility.

“PEO has set goals to reduce the building’s environmental footprint, and we’re really looking forward to keeping on top of managing energy savings and sustainability for the facility. Our job is to see where we can do things more cheaply, and in a more green and productive way, so that we can save PEO money and provide better services,” says John Cookson, facility manager with BLJC.

REFLECTION OF PROFESSION

The extra space and enhanced usability of PEO’s new headquarters should enable the association to fulfill its goal

of effectively liaising with and supporting various engineering organizations and initiatives. The Advanced Design and Manufacturing Institute, the Ontario Professional Engineers Foundation for Education and Engineers Without Borders will now all have workspaces.

“Part of our vision is to have others associated with engineering use our space as their home. We can now bring in the broader engineering community and engage with them at a higher level,” says Kim Allen, P.Eng., FEC, PEO’s CEO/registrar.

PEO will now also be able to better project its vital roles as a regulator and promoter of the development of the profession, and better positioned to highlight the value and benefits a regulated engineering profession brings to society. Plans are under way to use the building’s lobby as an exhibit space to reflect important accomplishments and breakthroughs in the engineering profession. When more building space becomes available in 2014, the association plans to create an engineering museum and interactive learning centre to further highlight to the public the social contributions of the profession.

“I think it’s great that PEO is trying to make this building a showcase of the profession,” says Catherine Karakatsanis, P.Eng., FEC, PEO’s 2009-2010 president, who during her term helped steer the vision for the new headquarters. “If this building can stand out and show our talents, I think it’s going to help the public have a better understanding of what we do as engineers, and what’s possible in creating a really exceptional work environment.”