

COMMERCIAL Builder/Architect

Feature

OEC Business Interiors, Inc.: *Furnishing Today's Workplace*

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Corporate America is not what it used to be. Companies have shifted away from the uncomfortable chairs, harsh lighting and drab interiors that once defined the American workplace. Today, the average American works 47.1 hours a week, driving companies to rethink their office spaces to enhance productivity and employee satisfaction. As a result, owners are not only responsible for containing costs and driving profits, but also for providing a workplace that is more functional, healthier for employees and more environmentally responsible.

To achieve this, companies have become more and more conscious about how they plan their space. "A company's physical space not only has to be aesthetically pleasing, but it must also be functional, flexible and ultimately affordable. Today, companies need to integrate their environment to accept technology, accommodate the growth or reduction of their workforce, and offer versatility to increase communication and productivity," notes Jerry

Schiro, Marketing Manager, OEC Business Interiors, Inc.

OFFICE TRENDS

"Today, companies have begun to place less emphasis on corporate hierarchies, focusing more on cross-functional teams, multitasking, creative thinking and group processes. As a result, many have decided to shrink the average size of their private offices in order to allocate



OEC's founders,
Frances and Raymond
Riha Sr.

more real estate to collaborative spaces that promote better communication and idea sharing," states George Deolitsis, Senior Vice President of Sales. Additionally, more and more companies are shifting their private offices from the perimeter



OEC's showroom

PHOTO BY BOB MEAD, PHOTO PROS, INC.

of the building to the center in order to allow more natural light in through the windows, where it can help increase worker productivity and support a more comfortable, ergonomically correct work environment.

With the rising costs of health care, ergonomics and overall employee wellness are key issues in the workplace today. Companies are seeking out options that provide a healthier work environment, and they look to firms such as OEC to provide both knowledge as well as product solutions. Businesses today need to evaluate their entire work environment such as furniture, lighting, computer support tools and acoustical privacy to ensure their space will not only help them achieve their business goals, but will also promote a healthy work environment for their employees.

In addition to a healthy work environment, many companies are working to minimize their effects on the planet's environment by adopt-

Even small, sustainable efforts can make a difference and bring about a positive reaction.

— Sherrie Riha, Senior Vice President, Sales and Marketing

The Company

Headquartered in Elmhurst, IL, with a sales office in Chicago, OEC Business Interiors, Inc. (OEC) has been providing workplace solutions since 1955. Founded by Frances and Raymond Riha Sr., the firm is a family-owned, certified women's business enterprise with three generations of family active in the business. "We are a business, but we are also a family ... and that extends to each and every person that works for us," adds Frances Riha, CEO and chairman of the board. "That's one of the reasons we have been so successful over the years."

The company, which began with a staff of three people, is now one of the largest Steelcase dealerships in the country, servicing all 50 states. "We now routinely generate more revenue on a single order than we did in our entire first year of business," states Raymond Riha Sr., President.

This growth has compelled OEC to evolve over the years in order to stay ahead of the competition and maintain superior service levels. "We strive to meet and exceed our clients' expectations by understanding industry trends and the fluctuating demands of business today," says Raymond Riha Jr., Executive Vice President and General Manager. As a result, OEC has become a fully integrated solutions provider offering sales consultation, project management, technical design, order management, manufacturing, delivery and installation. The firm offers a broad product portfolio, including furniture, work tools, cabinetry, lighting, architectural products and floor coverings. Product lines include (among others) Steelcase, Kimball Office, National, HON, InterfaceFLOR, Lees and the Shaw companies.

Our team approach allows for one point of contact to minimize confusion, but ensures that our partners have access to all the resources that the team has to offer.

— Tony Anderson, Vice President of OEC's A&D/Real Estate Team

ing sustainable practices. Sherrie Riha, Senior Vice President, Sales and Marketing, notes, "It may not be practical or even possible for some companies to achieve the status of LEED certification, but they can still do their part to protect the future for all of us."

In terms of sustainability, manufacturers have begun to incorporate healthier materials into product design and development, creating products that are safer for both people and the environment. Sustainable materials can often be recovered and reused, helping owners reduce the environmental footprint left by their commercial interiors.

THE TEAM

In an effort to better serve its partners such as architectural firms and real estate companies, OEC has established a specific team of individuals possessing over 30 total years of experience in the real estate and design industries. "We have a core group of people that understand the needs of the design and real estate com-



OEC's executive boardroom

As OEC's primary business partners, Steelcase and InterfaceFLOR, have developed two of the strongest environmental programs in the commercial furniture and floor-covering industries, allowing OEC to offer its clients ecologically responsible solutions in addition to quality products.

OEC's great room and employee cafeteria



PHOTO BY BOB MEAD, PHOTO PROS, INC.

munities, allowing us to uniquely service them. Our goal is to align our services to be consistent with their needs and their clients' needs, allowing us to become a more valuable resource to them. These services could include budget development, furniture solutions, planning or specifications," explains Tony Anderson, Vice President of OEC's A&D/Real Estate team.

THE FUTURE

With its thorough understanding of the furniture industry and its willingness to adapt and grow to serve its clients' needs, OEC continues to act as a valuable resource to maximize its customers' interior spaces. As a result, OEC Business Interiors has set itself at the forefront in furnishing today's workspaces.

For further information on OEC Business Interiors, Inc., please visit www.oecbusinessinteriors.com or call (630) 589-5500. ■