

Real Estate

Custom solution

New HQ is designed to suit Langan Engineering's needs

By **Joshua Burd**, June 20, 2016 at 3:00 AM



Ronald Fuerst, managing principal; David Gockel, CEO and president; and Beverly Williams, VP of human resources, Langan Engineering. - (PHOTOS BY AARON HOUSTON)

David Gockel goes back to what he lightheartedly calls “the anthropological study.”

When Langan Engineering was contemplating a move from its Elmwood Park office in 2013, the firm hired experts from CBRE to observe how its employees worked and moved about the space. The study lasted several months, he said, with the goal of trying to identify how Langan could incorporate those habits into the design of its new headquarters site.

The result is a tailor-made, state-of-the-art 77,000-square-foot space in Parsippany.

“If you really did a deep dive here, you’d understand that this is not just a cookie-cutter open floor plate design,” said Gockel, CEO and president of Langan, “but it’s highly customized to who we are as an organization and it’s highly customized to how we get our work done.”

Langan executives toured their new headquarters with NJBIZ recently, touting a space that has modern technology and a heavy emphasis on collaboration. Housing some 320 employees at 300 Kimball Drive, the space is the new base of operations for a firm that has more than two dozen offices globally and is one of the largest privately held companies in New Jersey.

The firm, a leader in the development and environmental consulting sectors, projects more than \$200 million in revenue this

year. But setting a course to the future starts with providing the right setting for its employees, its executives said, and they're already seeing a difference since moving to Parsippany last November.

"You have people that are more engaged," said Ronald Fuerst, managing principal with Langan. "They're seeing things that they normally don't work with — a geotechnical engineer will see some environmental work or a civil engineer will see some other disciplines, and that actually has integrated a lot more learning, particularly from the younger ones who are trying to get more accustomed to that.

"So that's definitely been a plus all across the board."

That engagement comes in any number of places, from its conference and huddle rooms to the building's modern cafeteria and outdoor patio. But the centerpiece of Langan's new digs is known as "the Hub," a sleek breakroom complete with two center islands and diner-style booths, with a collapsible wall that leads into a vast multipurpose room.

"(It's) just an amazing hive of activity where our employees consistently run into each other and catch up with people," Gockel said. "And it's just a tremendous convenience for the folks."

Langan's move accounted for one of the largest lease deals in New Jersey's office market last year, following more than 25 years in Elmwood Park. Gockel said the firm explored sites elsewhere in Bergen County, while even contemplating a move over the New York State line, but determined it needed stay in New Jersey.

Parsippany then emerged as a winner because of its highway access, quality of life and the allure of a newly renovated, amenity-rich building off Interstate 80, Gockel said. He also noted that his staff "has access to a lot more affordable housing than we had in Bergen County," while the proximity to Morristown appeals to younger employees.

Still, such a move was not to be taken lightly, as Langan weighed the prospect of transitioning its employees to an open concept plan. To sell the move, the leadership team set up samples of their new work stations in Elmwood Park, sought input from staffers and arranged bus trips to Parsippany as the space was being built out.

It didn't take long for Langan employees to come around.



An employee wall, above, is a source of pride in Langan Engineering's new office. A bright lobby, right, is a gateway to the headquarters space.

STAYING CONNECTED

Langan Engineering's new headquarters might have every bell and whistle for its on-site employees, but it was also built with an eye toward the firm's offices beyond Parsippany. All told, the company has 20 other U.S. offices and six overseas — and it's still looking to grow. It's why Langan equipped the space with technology such as high-end videoconferencing, and other "hard technology that allows us to have really every office now be interactive at your fingertips," which Ronald Fuerst said "really goes a long way toward collaboration."

“So, it’s both sides of that equation,” said Fuerst, managing principal. “It’s not just the space, but it’s how we connect all of our people and take advantage of all of our resources internally.”

As such, Langan’s companywide weekly operations meetings on Monday have been much more rewarding in recent months.

“It’s scaling it up and it’s all about speeding communication,” he said. “The faster you can do these things and get people to talk and share information, you’re at a much better advantage.”

“They really got a sense for how the space was going to change and how it was going to be much better,” Fuerst said. “The amount of light we brought into the space is astronomical compared to what it was before, and if you take those offices around the perimeter and really open it up, it really changes things.

“From a psychology standpoint, it’s amazing what that little change does. It allows people to just have a happier disposition when they come in.”

The space also has become a great recruiting tool.

“It’s made human resources’ job of recruiting much easier, because there’s not a big sell,” said Beverly Williams, vice president of human resources. “It’s incredible — they come to the building and they’re in awe over the building. They walk inside our office and we give them a tour, and without even telling them what we do, they want to work here just because of the environment.”

That’s a key factor for Langan, as it competes for talent against not only other engineering firms, but other industries. Gockel cited the decrease in interest in the field among students, as many who are skilled in science and technology gravitate toward Wall Street or tech careers.

For those who do have the potential to be part of Langan’s future, Gockel believes the firm has now given itself an even bigger edge.

“An organization is only as good as its people are as a whole,” he said. “And we want to provide an environment that’s second to none, that new people come here and they say, ‘Yeah, this is where I want to work.’ We want people who are already here to say, ‘I love being in the office. It’s a great environment. I love spending time there.’ And I think we’ve really been able to achieve that.”



The Hub, a 1,040-square-foot break room, is the focal point of Langan Engineering’s new office.



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