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FOCUS EDITOR

BERNADETTE.STARZEE@LIBN.COM

631.913.4225

@BSTARZEE1

BANKING/
 WEALTH MANAGEMENT



Photo by Andy Warner

IN A HUDDLE: Members of the business development, digital, community development and communications departments met in one of Bethpage FCU's flexible meeting areas.

FLEXIBLE SPACE AGE

Bethpage FCU's offices undergoing a transformation

By **BERNADETTE STARZEE**

The corporate offices of Bethpage Federal Credit Union are undergoing a transformation. Mobile technology and shifting work styles have led the credit union to introduce a modern floor plan with integrated workstations, collaborative areas and huddle rooms at its new 23,000-square-foot space at 998 S. Oyster Bay Road. Offices at its nearby headquarters — at 899 S. Oyster Bay Road — are being renovated in a similar style.

Employees from Bethpage FCU's former Hicksville offices, along with some groups from headquarters, began moving into the new space in November. In total, 14 departments and 125 employees are housed on the third floor of the former Sunbeam building, recently owned by Stet Equities, where Bethpage FCU has taken a 12-year lease. Renovations at the headquarters building, which the credit union has owned since 1988, will be completed by the end of next year.

In announcing the new office design, Bethpage FCU President and CEO Wayne Grossé called it "a big departure for Bethpage and for many businesses that today still operate under a more traditional work setting."

According to Grossé, the organization's hierarchy plays little role in the design, supporting a "collective, team approach."

"We want to help our employees play an integral

role in the growth of Bethpage by fostering greater interaction, teamwork and innovation," he said.

In many corporate settings, executive offices are placed along the exterior walls of the building — where the windows are — surrounding areas of cubicles in the center. In Bethpage FCU's new location, however, natural light shines from the windows into open space, where cubicles are broken up by a variety of common "huddle" areas featuring movable furniture in different shapes and sizes to meet individual department needs. In the interests of the floor, there is a large training room with desks and chairs on wheels that can be configured classroom-style, in a circular pattern or otherwise. There are also meeting rooms in a variety of sizes and themes — some named for areas of Long Island, others for planets and places in pay homage to the building's Grumman heritage — and a couple of large separate conference rooms. There's also a large cafeteria and a wellness room.

Employees can plug in laptops in the huddle areas, cafeteria and meeting rooms, many of which are equipped with large screens and writable walls.

Planning for the renovation has been in the works for a couple of years.

"We put departments that work closely with each other next to each other," said Linda Arney, senior vice-

president of corporate affairs for the credit union. "We worked with Staples Business Advantage, and they met with every department and worked with our project team to understand who had what needs. They asked questions like, 'Do you use a whiteboard? Do you need to be standing or sitting when you meet? Will you be huddled around a computer designing things together?'"

As a result of these meetings, for instance, a huddle area between the business development and community development groups features stadium-style seating and a white board for presentations or brainstorming. The digital group has a large screen and a table surrounded by interchangeable seating that can be arranged in different configurations, depending on the meeting. The two corporate communications coordinators requested a shared cubicle with a table in the middle, where they could swiftly team together as needed.

"It's wonderful," Keith Moran, digital banking manager, said of the new space. "The openness fosters collaboration."

Some of the meeting rooms must be booked in advance, but others are first-come, first-served. Small groups can head to space-themed rooms — such as Mars, Jupiter or Neptune — or those named for Grumman.

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New flexible space, driven by technology, lifts morale

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places like Wildcat or Bevo, or favorite Long Island sites like Fire Island and Montauk. Employees can fixate their phones to ring in the meeting rooms, which have differently colored chairs and tables – some high, some low – and various technical features.

"The technology involved is very user-friendly for everyone, not just IT," said Kelle DiPalma, a corporate communications coordinator. "It's not like you're walking into a meeting room and there's a bunch of wires. You just plug in and that's it."

Kevin McKenna, senior manager of business development, raved the new space "very functional and efficient."

It also "creates a fun atmosphere," he said. "It's a great place to work."

Indeed, employee morale has increased over the past year, which Army said can be partly attributed to the new space. In rating whether "The organization makes investments to make me more successful," employees scored the credit union 5.30 on a 6-point scale, up from 5.11 in November 2015.

"Our employee engagement survey results are our highest ever at 89 percent," said Army, referring to the organization's entire staff of 650.

"Open and collaborative space tends to

appeal to millennials in particular, and notably about 50 percent of our employee base is from the millennial generation," Army said. "I think it stems from the way colleges are now – there is a lot of open, collaborative workspace. Millennials said this is what they wanted, and they will continue to be a big part of our workforce."

Millennials have partly driven a larger trend toward flexible office space, but that's not the whole story, according to Ellen Rudin, senior managing director of CBRE's Long Island and outer borough offices.

"People point to millennials, but technology is driving the flexible office space trend," Rudin said. "Because of technology, there is so much more flexibility built into the way we work. If you want to work on a train, you get up and bring your laptop into and/or office. I think the workspaces that provide that flexibility are more effective."

CBRE's Melville offices underwent renovations similar to those of Bethpage FCU in 2015, and Rudin has worked with clients on integrating more flexible space.

"What we've seen is most industries, other than law, are moving toward flexible space," Rudin said. "The law firms we have worked with have stuck with a more traditional office environment."



Photo by Judy Baker

LINDA ARMY: We believe the renovations are having a positive impact on employees' work life.

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