

Focus on Leadership

A SPECIAL SERIES ON CALGARY'S BUSINESS VISIONARIES

A special publication of the Calgary Herald in partnership with Calgary Economic Development

Tuesday, January 27, 2011

Athene helps businesses find a home

Athene creates and maintains beautiful, functional office space for those who would rather concentrate on their business instead of furniture choices, copiers and long-term leasing contracts.

"The fundamental premise of our business is that not everybody wants or needs their own office space, complete with all the headaches that go with it, and certainly don't need to work downtown. And even if they need to be downtown occasionally, they don't need to be there all the time," says Shaune Eldred, president of Athene Offices & Services in Calgary.

She says having ready-to-use office space available outside the downtown core helps small business people and professionals avoid rush-hour traffic, commitments to build-outs, long-term leases, personal guarantees and the need to hire support staff.

They can just move in and go to work, surrounded by like-minded business people.

"It permits larger companies to set up a low-cost, low-commitment presence outside the core, whether for specific staff on a permanent basis or to be time-shared among a number of employees," says Eldred.

Shared offices have been around for quite a while, she adds, but Athene has taken the idea to a new level with high-end facilities, more services, engaged and friendly staff, more advanced technology and a distributed workforce in its business services group.

The local family-owned business has been very successful in meeting a need in the market that had gone unfulfilled for far too long, says Eldred.

"Prior to Athene Offices, the choice in ready-to-use office space in Calgary was professional executive centres down-



Shaune Eldred, president of Athene Offices & Services.

Wil Andruschak photos

town, 'spare' offices offered on an as-available basis by businesses that had excess space or less attractive suburban office centres that generally lacked professional support services," says Eldred.

Athene's owners invested more than \$5 million to create three suburban centres that match or exceed any available space downtown, in terms of quality surroundings and professional services, that are specifically targeted at business and professional people who have no need or desire to be downtown every day.

There was a rapid uptake in offices provided by Athene between 2005 and 2008, and Eldred says while 2009's downturn meant little growth for Athene, 2010 proved to be a year of recovery with an

increase in business once again.

"Technology built into the centres gives us a true 'plug-and-play' environment so that we can meet and exceed our clients' requirements very quickly," says Eldred.

Athene is working to provide better, faster, more accessible technology for its clients without the need for clients to manage a complex environment.

And more efficient support services allow clients to off-load administrative functions and focus on their core business.

She says more innovative services in occasional-use offices, multi-person shared space, "virtual office" services for those who work from home, and more partnerships with complementary organizations that offer services such as website management and

computer support are also on the horizon.

"We are also considering investing in several 'boutique' Athene centres developed in partnership with forward-thinking landlords in mixed-use buildings, and are evaluating plans for additional centres both in Calgary and other cities," says Eldred.

She believes its partnership with Action Calgary will give Athene exposure to larger corporations as they see the benefit of Athene's solutions in the marketplace. "Athene was really developed for entrepreneurs and small businesses, but we are becoming more and more attractive as head offices to international and larger corporations as they begin to understand our technology and environment," says Eldred.

Bennett Jones takes pride in personnel

In a law firm, you are whom you employ.

This is what makes Bennett Jones LLP one of the most experienced, sophisticated, pioneering and prestigious law firms in the country.

"We pride ourselves on our institutional knowledge and intellectual capital," says Perry Spitznagel, vice-chair of Bennett Jones and managing partner in the Calgary office. "When we take someone like David Dodge into the international community to talk about what's truly going on within the Canadian economy, we're providing access to invaluable insight."

Dodge was the governor of the Bank of Canada, and he is one of many prominent professionals at the almost 90-year-old firm, which offers legal expertise across more than 50 industries and areas of law. It also supports the largest public policy group in a Canadian law firm.

Among the firm's lawyers, past and present, are a Canadian prime minister and deputy prime minister, a provincial premier, federal and provincial cabinet ministers, a Canadian ambassador to the United States, a deputy minister and deputy attorney general of the department of justice, two supreme court justices, a Court of Appeal appointee, several chief justices of federal and provincial courts, numerous appointees to provincial supreme courts and the Queen's Bench, several chairmen of securities commissions and a president of the Canadian Bar Association.

"We recruit top talent, and we retain top talent," says Spitznagel. "We want to project Calgary and Alberta and all the strengths we have into the world at large. Calgary Economic Development shares this aspiration, so I think we can complement each other, and it just makes sense to marshal our forces and join together to accomplish our mutual goals."

Money tool gives RBC edge in marketplace

Royal Bank of Canada was the first bank in the country to launch an integrated online financial management tool, and RBC continues to innovate and create new products in a highly competitive market.

The bank's system, myFinanceTracker, is an online financial management tool integrated into the online banking system and automatically categorizing transactions, tracking expenses and providing advanced budgeting capabilities for all personal banking and credit card accounts.

"MyFinanceTracker will help our clients save time and money, while managing their finances," says James McGuire, vice-president of digital strategy

and experience at RBC. "Canadians of all ages and income levels are telling us they have a desire to better understand their financial situation. This online tool can help clients track and manage where they are spending money, an essential first step in reaching any financial goal — whether it's saving money for a child's education, retirement, getting out of debt or putting money away for a big purchase."

Canada's largest bank, measured by assets and market capitalization, RBC has made it a priority to be responsive to its clients' needs and desires. A recent RBC poll showed there was demand for advanced yet simple online banking capabilities.

About nine out of 10 Canadians using financial tools take a combination approach to money management, according to the poll, and among this group, 23 per cent were looking for an automated way to access transactions that was simple and intuitive.

MyFinanceTracker is available at no cost to all personal RBC online banking customers, enabling clients to create budgets and track their spending habits. If users exceed their set limits, an alert actually notifies them.

Clients can also establish account balance targets for one or more accounts and an alert will be triggered when the balance of an account drops below that target.

SAIT produces work-ready graduates

Learning can be discovered within its very walls — literally.

The new Trades and Technology Complex at SAIT Polytechnic exemplifies the value the school places on innovation in every undertaking, says Irene Lewis, the school's president and CEO.

She says the complex's design team, which includes many SAIT graduates, created a plan that supports a learner-centred, flexible approach to teaching while also "exposing" its inner workings.

"For instance, elements of the buildings' construction, mechanical and electrical functions will be exposed to serve as teaching tools and — for

passers-by — as a showcase of the training provided inside," says Lewis. "In addition, the design and use of the buildings will mirror the real-life integration of the energy, construction and manufacturing sectors in a way never seen before."

"Apprentices and aspiring technicians and technologists will come together in an academic setting, just as they will in industry."

When completed in 2012, the complex will provide more than 740,000 square feet of additional training space to accommodate about 8,100 more full-time and part-time students every year.

SAIT has long been a champion for making a high quality,

job-focused education a priority, and the school helps ensure its curriculum is current and meets industry needs through the operation of 65 program advisory committees comprised of more than 1,000 business and industry advisers.

"In the end, we produce work-ready graduates for smart jobs," says Lewis, adding SAIT's goal is to be recognized as Canada's premier polytechnic institute. "Participation in Action Calgary is another valuable means of collaborating with others to make a difference in workforce development and productivity; in industry development and diversification; and in extending the international reach of our city."



President and owner of RGO Office Products Ross Glen.

RGO gives clients full service

RGO gives clients full service if you have space and phone lines, RGO can handle the rest.

RGO Office Products first opened its doors in 1966 and since then, RGO has grown to become the largest supplier of office furnishings and workplace expertise in Canada.

"We offer high-quality products through a minimum number of suppliers, so we know our clients are getting a good product that we are able to service when needed," says Ross Glen, president and owner of RGO, who brings 56 years of industry experience to his position.

RGO and its affiliated companies have more than 100 service staff on the payroll and employ a total of approximately 300 people. It also operates 55 trucks for delivery and service.

The company is able to equip offices with everything from furniture, carpet and window coverings to digital photocopiers, shredders and electronic whiteboards.

RGO can help clients create plans for their spaces, considering design, ergonomics and asset management.

It also carries highly recognized brands of product in each category, including Steelcase, Canon, Hunter Douglas, Shaw Contract and Kyocera.

A 50,000-square-foot showroom gives clients access to a diverse line of products.

With a motto of "keeping it clean ... and green," RGO would rather clean, maintain and re-condition equipment than replace it, so it works with clients to explore all the possibilities first.

"We serve a broad range of customers, including those in the medical, educational and energy sectors, as well as several others," says Glen. "We make it a priority to contribute to the communities where we work, providing support in the areas of education and health care through local organizations."

"This is a locally owned business that cares about the community where it operates."

SUCCESS IS DETERMINED BY

ACTION

Join Action Calgary at www.calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com
info@calgaryeconomicdevelopment.com

CALGARY
ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT