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SPACES



A fresh feeling

UB Greensfelder remodels office one year after merger

By Melissa Rubalcaba Riske

One year after forming UB Greensfelder — from the merger of Ulmer & Berne and Greensfelder Hemker & Gale — the law firm's Chicago office completed a renovation that marries the two firms' cultures with improved workspace.

"The renovation of the office played a large role in the successful integration and merger of our offices," said co-managing partner Scott P. Kadish.

Chicago is the only city where Ulmer & Berne and Greensfelder Hemker & Gale each had offices. In fact, the firms' offices were both located on Madison Street, separated by a few city blocks. After reviewing spaces and building options, the leadership decided to cohabitate on the 33rd floor at 200 W. Madison St.

Chicago architecture firm Eckenhoff Saunders designed the renovations, marrying the culture of the two firms and blending office updates into existing features. Chris Nikkel, an associate principal with Eckenhoff Saunders, had discussions with UB Greensfelder leaders about how he could connect its clients and the firm's image into the office design.

"There's value in these conversations," Nikkel said. "I think so much of the workplace. The space reflects (your) culture, who you are as a business and the clients you serve. That sets the tone for how you design the space."

UB Greensfelder's 23,000-square-foot office sought technological upgrades, more offices and collaboration work areas. The culture of the Chicago office is one of respect, according to Chicago partner-in-charge Thadford A. Felton. He said UB Greensfelder attorneys care for each other and wanted a space carved out so they could be together — whether for dining or after-work conversations.

"Once a week we like to get together," Felton said. "It's less about unwinding. We like each other and the chance to foster our culture and communication."

Felton adds that the firm's culture is not about titles. It's about knowing everyone's name and placing value on their contributions, whether attorney or supporting staff.

ROUNDING INTO FORM

The café space doubled in size and the additional space was crafted into an L-shape. The room's long side provides a large, casual seating area and when it rounds the corner of the 'L' there is additional seating adjacent to counter and space for a beer tap that dispenses local brews, including Goose Island Beer and a wine cooler.

UB Greensfelder's Chicago office has almost 50 attorneys and staff. While other firms have opted for smaller and uniform offices,

UB Greensfelder opted to retain the existing, larger office spaces. It also created more offices to accommodate additional hires.

"Remodeling of our office is an investment of growing talent and future growth of the Chicago office," Kadish said. He also said the firm can acquire additional space at 200 W. Madison St.

The renovated Chicago office is the third largest office that resulted from the merger, Kadish said.

"We all recognize Chicago is a really good opportunity to grow in the future," Kadish said. "We're not going to grow for the sake of growth, but what makes sense and fits in the interest of culture, client services and sophistication."

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Client meetings and depositions take place in updated conference rooms off the reception area. Each room is equipped with state-of-the-art video conference technology while the walls are painted in neutral blue tones, according to Jessica LaPointe, interior designer with Eckenhoff Saunders.

"It's welcoming and still seems sophisticated," she said. "We tied function and aesthetics."

In addition to the updated conference rooms, there are large workspaces throughout the interior. UB Greensfelder calls them "War Rooms" and uses them for multiple functions, including impromptu team meetings and temporary workspaces since the furniture is movable.

"I don't see us as individual groups (or) silos," Felton said. "There is a lot of cross collaboration."



Nikkel said Eckenhoff Saunders defines itself as a mixed market firm of 45 individuals, providing services for workplaces, hospitality, health care and higher education.

"I think it makes us better, well rounded," Nikkel said, adding the firm surpassed its 40th anniversary of architectural design services in Chicago and Northern Illinois.

Working in these different sectors enables the team to draw from the best concepts for its clients, Nikkel said. Additionally, Eckenhoff Saunders has completed other office renovations at 200 W. Madison St., giving it a deep knowledge of the building's internal workings and fostering strong relationships with building staff, he said. UB Greensfelder's renovations started in late 2024 and were completed in February, in time for the firm's first anniversary. The quick turnaround was helped because the office was temporarily relocated to another floor.

The office renovation wasn't a "gut-job" as Eckenhoff Saunders was able to merge some of the space's existing features with a fresh look, including redesigning the reception desk with mosaic glass tiles that reflect the light streaming from nearby windows, LaPointe said.

The existing office space had glass walls in place, but the renovation went further by adding a panel of fluted glass directly behind the reception desk. Now the natural light filters into the area and provides privacy for the conference room and workspaces behind the reception.

"The space feels open," Nikkel said.

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