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KSS Architects Completes New Headquarters for The Children's Place in 11 Months
Fast-tracked project exemplifies benefits of office consolidation

PRINCETON, N.J.—KSS Architects faced the test of time for their recent fit-out of a new 140,000 square-foot corporate headquarters for The Children's Place, the national retailer of children's clothing and merchandise.

The Children's Place wanted to relocate and consolidate their New Jersey offices to three floors at 500 Plaza Drive, Secaucus, an 11-story building located in an active mixed-use office and retail development. Like many companies these days, TCP wanted to consolidate multiple office locations into one site to improve their efficiency, said KSS principal and director of interior design Sheila Nall, ASID, LEED AP.

"Consolidation can help firms reduce redundancies, increase work productivity, and reduce lease costs," Nall said.

For their office fit-out, TCP had an aggressive schedule they wanted to meet.

"It was February 2009 and The Children's Place told us they wanted to begin the phased move-in by October with completion by the beginning of 2010," Nall said.

KSS took on the challenge enthusiastically. In less than a year, they guided the project team, which included general contractor River Drive Construction and MEP engineer The Rock Brook Consulting Group, from space planning and programming to design and construction.

The new headquarters integrates open work areas with individual offices for executives, designers and administrative staff members to collaborate together. The space also features two full-scale mock stores for designers and marketing staff to experiment with product displays and to train staff to ensure stores across the country maintained a consistent brand image.

Formerly occupied by multiple tenants, the three-story space had to be gutted completely. By continuously planning ahead and staying on top of any issues that arose in the field, KSS kept the project moving forward from day one.

"During construction, we committed our project manager, Tami Pegos, to one to two site visits per week so she could answer questions on the spot and provide real-time feedback on design and planning issues," Nall said.

Field conditions often arise that will require coordination and adjustments to the design. KSS' frequent visits to the site were integral to the project's success and expediency, said Pegos.

"On a fast-tracked project such as this, making a decision quickly is critical to keeping the project moving," Pegos said.



Lobby and reception area



Mock storefront



Design studios

Because of her frequent site visits, Pegos eliminated the lag time between discovering and resolving unexpected issues. Her accessibility to the contractors and client kept the lines of communication between the design and engineering professionals open, which was also vital to the project's success, she said.

"For example, a conflict occurred between the location of mechanical elements--piping and large ductwork--and the layout of the light fixtures and ceiling 'clouds' in the cafeteria," Pegos said. "Because I was on site when the conflict was discovered, I could direct the installers to keep them moving forward while assuring everyone the design intent was maintained."

With their experience in renovation and construction and local expertise, KSS also knew how to streamline the township's review, permitting and approvals process by submitting clear and detailed documents and project phasing.

The Children's Place headquarters integrates 535 individual workstations and 32 private offices with strategically located open collaborative spaces. KSS fulfilled The Children's Place's need for more meeting space by designing 17 formal conference rooms, 20 informal meeting rooms, a boardroom and training rooms. A full-scale data center occupies the top floor of the three-story space.

KSS selected finish materials that create a corporate yet playful work environment that strategically features TCP's four signature colors--pink, blue, green and purple--as accents.

In the design studios, carpet tiles in the eye-catching hues enliven the space and distinguish the different groups in an otherwise large and overwhelming space. Vivid purple and pink feature walls make a simple yet bold statement in the main cafeteria. A cafe located between the two mock stores simulates a "mall-like" atmosphere that allows the design and merchandising groups to try out product displays, showcase current products to visitors and hold impromptu meetings.

The project incorporates several sustainable finish materials, including the reuse of available materials. The reception area, main corridors and cafeteria have about 4,500 sf of porcelain floor tiles that came from existing stock that was previously used in TCP's retail stores. The wood flooring in the cafe between the two mock stores was also surplus material from previous stores.

Daylighting filters inside through perimeter windows to open work areas, design studios and collaborative areas, augmenting the project's energy-efficient fluorescent lighting.

KSS also balanced TCP designers' need for extensive storage with their need for pin-up and layout space by designing versatile and efficient storage units that integrate interchangeable racks and shelving, tackable panels and spacious work surfaces for designing and layout.

The project began in February 2009 and was completed in January 2010.

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About KSS Architects LLP

KSS Architects is an award-winning architectural design firm with offices in Princeton, N.J., and Philadelphia. Founded in 1983, KSS specializes in the design and planning of educational institutions, industrial buildings, corporate interiors, and commercial real estate. Current projects include the new campus center at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and the Dorrance Hamilton Public Media Commons at WHYY in Philadelphia. KSS was named Firm of the Year by the New Jersey Chapter of American Institute of Architects (AIA NJ) in 2009, 2005 and 2002. For more information, visit www.kssarchitects.com.