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OFFICE

LoyaltyOne (Air Miles Reward Program) Customer Care Centre, Toronto

Figure3, Toronto

It must have seemed like a brilliant idea at first: bringing power and data to the desktop down from the ceiling, by means of slender metal power poles, instead of fishing it up from the floor. Brilliant until the poles began to rattle when people walked by and tilt slightly, lending a touch of rinky-dink to many an otherwise crisp corporate interior.

Figure3 highlighted this typical office

shortcoming at the LoyaltyOne Customer Care Centre in Toronto, tweaked it and turned it into a witty, colourful branding feature that repeats as a giant-scale stencil on the fenestration. Along the way, the designers transformed the large, 50,000-square-foot bullpen into a memorable work space.

Extra-tall poles stretch diagonally from the floor to the joists supporting the

20-foot-high ceiling. Collectively, the crisscrossed poles stride through the open-concept space like a battalion of colossal Pick-up Sticks, their distinctive colours seemingly imbuing the poles with different personalities. The blue poles evoke the corporate colour of LoyaltyOne's ubiquitous Air Miles Reward collector card. Further to reinforce the client's branding message, thousands of blue card blanks were painstakingly assembled to form privacy screens hooding seating areas that function as intimate collaboration pods within the sprawling open space. These pods contribute an increase in conference areas by half.

While downsizing is often a downer, the lively open space helps the medicine go down, the medicine being a reduction in personal real estate for the 400 customer reps from 140 to 125 square feet. The democratic space planning also helps ensure high morale. All staff share equal access to daylight and views, thanks to the low panel heights of workstations in the open areas. A variety of formal and informal meeting areas, a café, lunchroom, games room, quiet room, knowledge lab, prayer rooms, massage room and several lounges ensure that workers will collaborate across their departmental silos.

Figure3 assisted the client in the initial search for an energy-saving site and evaluated the costs of a 10-year LEED program featuring an 800-panel solar rooftop array (Canada's largest). Solatubes (a light-piping system) direct daylight to the centre of the work area, reducing glare and minimizing power draw for interior lighting. And workers enjoy sitting near operable windows.

Design team: partners Christopher Wright and Caroline Hughes; senior team leaders Darryl Balaski, Erin Armstrong and Eric Yorath; team leaders Jackie Prawecki, Steve Tsai and Angela Stinson; project designers Bradley Marks, Laura Burke and Pavel Voronenko

