

# BANKER & TRADESMAN

THE REAL ESTATE, BANKING AND COMMERCIAL WEEKLY FOR MASSACHUSETTS

ESTABLISHED 1872

Meeting and Event Facilities

## Bringing Meeting and Event Space In-House

By Shelly McPhee

Client meetings and firm-sponsored events figure prominently in the way O'Neill and Assoc. provides communications and government relations services to all of our clients throughout New England. Whether providing real estate, legal, financial or other professional services, every company inevitably confronts the ongoing business challenge of finding functional and appealing meeting and event space.



When our firm recently relocated to new space in Downtown Boston, the required renovations presented a unique opportunity for us to incorporate on-site meeting and event space into our plans that would allow us to host clients, work more productively, and better market ourselves. One of the key factors in our decision to purchase a 17,000-square-foot building was the opportunity to build out conference and meeting rooms that would accommodate the growth of our firm. Creating this space has largely eliminated the need to rent off-site venues for our meetings and events. While the upfront investment may be high, over time, you will regain your investment – taking into account the cost of room rentals and fees, catering and other associated expenses.

### You Know Best

No one knows your industry, your company culture, or your brand, better than you do. A hands-on approach is absolutely necessary for creating office space that is useful to your clients and employees and that reflects the image you desire. Just as the architects and builders bring their expertise to the table, your input will ensure that their work generates the results best suited to your company's particular needs.

Your clients and employees will have become accustomed to the look and feel of your current space. It is important to either maintain or exceed this standard in the new environment you create. O'Neill and Assoc. moved from a prestigious office tower to a smaller building a few blocks away. From the furnishings and amenities, to the interior design details like crown moldings and recessed lighting, we were able to achieve the look and feel our clients had come to expect.

Your first step should be deciding how

*SHELLY L. MCPHEE is chief operating officer of O'Neill and Assoc., a communications and government relations firm based in Boston. She was responsible for oversight of the renovation of O'Neill and Assoc. new headquarters in Boston.*

much meeting and event space is needed. On any given day at our offices, O'Neill and Assoc. may hold four client meetings, convene a practice division meeting, call together a company-wide meeting, and host an after-hours political fundraiser. These gatherings can involve as few as two people and as many as 75. By assessing our needs, the available space, and the various room configurations, we came up with a solution that involves five conference rooms of varying sizes. By arranging some adjacent to each other, adjoining them with glass doors, and keeping them in close proximity to a large lobby area, we transformed two rooms into a larger event space boasting an overflow area.



### Which Amenities?

How will these spaces be used? What services will you provide in each? It is important to think through these details early, as many amenities – wireless capabilities, internet access and other multi-media functions – are costly to introduce later. These decisions need to be made in the design phase well before any construction begins. Even furniture placement must be decided early in order to ensure that the necessary electrical requirements are compatible for the technology and layout you have in mind for each room.

As a public affairs firm, we provide a wide array of services including media training, messaging workshops and speech coaching, in addition to hosting daily government and community relations client meetings and various social functions.

In our case, hassle-free audio/visual capabilities were crucial for the many presentations we give. One first floor conference room presented a challenge on where to place the audio-visual equipment as two sides of the room have large windows. The area had once been an open terrace before being enclosed by us to create additional meeting space. In addition to expansive windows, we designed this space with a tambour door that opens to a corridor, an adjacent kitchen servery on an interior wall and two sets of doors opening to our lobby, and an adjoining smaller meeting room on another side. We were very limited on where we could install a projector and screen for business presentations, so we decided on an automated drop-down projection screen that lowers from the ceiling with a push of a button, a ceiling-mounted LCD projector, and a wireless computer console that allows internet connectivity and access to our server. As our largest conference space, it also needed a television. But, we could not mount a plasma screen on the wall due to our space restrictions. As a solution, we configured the LCD projector for satellite television and

installed speakers in the ceiling.

On our lowest level, we took advantage of a former theater-style meeting room and transformed it into a specialized media room. It is in this room that we hold media training and message development sessions with clients, as well as collaborative internal team meetings. This room is equipped with modular-type furniture that can be arranged in multiple configurations, an interactive electronic whiteboard that captures notes to a computer for easy saving and sharing, a mobile LCD projector stand, and a plasma television.

### Food Service Needs

In any function space there is a need to accommodate catering. We designed two different floors to have service kitchens so that multiple meetings and functions could take place simultaneously. For our large functions, we installed deep sinks for dishes and serving pieces, wide refrigerators to accommodate serving platters, dishwashers and garbage disposals, adequate counter space for food preparation, and cabinet space for storage.

Our first floor meeting room connects to a service kitchen through a sideboard counter, hidden behind a tambour door. This allows staff to arrange deli platters for a working lunch and catering companies to set up a more elaborate event buffet without disturbing meetings in progress due to easy access to the kitchen. The lower-level media room is also located near an employee kitchen and lounge for convenient access to food during brainstorming sessions.

### Added Touches

Our new office space also projects our brand and history through the subtle, yet effective, naming of our meeting rooms. Given that our chief executive officer is Tom O'Neill and the O'Neill name holds a legacy in Massachusetts politics, we named our conference rooms the "Tip O'Neill Room," the "Greenway Room," the "Scollay Square Room," the "Bulfinch Room" and the "Beacon Hill Room."

These personal touches – combined with the well-planned meeting space – create an inviting environment for both our clients and employees. It starts with knowing your business and the services you offer clients. In order to satisfy your clients' needs you have to provide them with a number of services, and if you can do so within your own space, it is an added value. By providing outstanding meeting and event space, you position your firm as a leader in your industry. An added benefit is that you are providing your staff with the necessary tools and resources for them to perform at their highest level in a unique and creative environment. ■