

Headquarters building makes global impact by treading lightly



Heifer International

Little Rock, AR



Credits:

Today's Office, Inc.

Polk Stanley Rowland Curzon Porter Architects, Ltd.

Heifer International takes a practical approach to its mission of working to end hunger and poverty and to care for the earth. The organization provides families with livestock and training, and asks people to share their animals' offspring with others, along with their knowledge and skills. Thus, as Heifer puts it, they "pass on the gift." This helps not just individuals, but also helps communities share the resources of a healthy planet. It's the work begun by Dan West over 60 years ago, and it continues today in over 50 countries.

When Heifer needed a new headquarters, they were determined to demonstrate their mission and the sustainability principles they live by, and help their employees to communicate and collaborate better.

In other words, Heifer planned to practice exactly what it preaches.

"If we're going to have a lasting impact on ending world hunger, then everything we do must renew the earth and not deplete it," says Jo Luck, Heifer's president and CEO.

That meant a building that would use recycled and recyclable materials, and consume less energy. It meant interiors that were truly environmentally responsible. It meant providing every worker with natural light, a view to the outside, and an open, collaborative environment.

"We had to provide the same components as a normal corporate headquarters, but provide them in a more thoughtful and sustainable solution that reflected their mission. As we started looking at how to do this, it got down to the culture of how Heifer works," says Reese Rowland, partner of Polk Stanley Rowland Curzon Porter Architects, Ltd., Little Rock, AR, and lead architect on the project.

"Their philosophy is to treat everybody in the world as equals. We had to treat everybody at Heifer as equals. We wanted everyone to have equal access to natural light and a direct view to the outside."

"In all my travels around the world, the important decisions were made where people sat in a circle, facing each other as equals."

Dan West, Founder
Heifer International

As a result, Heifer's office changed from a ratio of 4 open plan workstations for every private office, to a ratio of 12 to 1. Workstations are a uniform 56 sq. ft.

The four-story, 94,000 sq. ft. building is just 62 feet deep, so daylight penetrates the entire floor plate. No storage or panel tops 54" high. Private offices have glass



Heifer wanted to have a lot of flexibility in their workstations, and they have it. The ped and table are mobile. The table is rectangular, 24" by 48", and when it sits against the panel it looks great. They can easily reconfigure their workstations.

walls. When the building is filled to capacity (400), everyone will still have an open, uncluttered view of the world inside and outside the building.

The building is the first of three planned for the site, a reclaimed brownfield that now features a wetlands and a host of wildlife. It's quite a change for Heifer's workers, who had been working in three separate offices.

Despite the new building's size, space is carefully used. There are fewer private offices and dedicated storage spaces than in their previous offices. "We had to come up with creative ways to provide enough storage within each workstation, and make employees comfortable with it," says Korie Trice, senior interior designer at Polk Stanley.

Each workstation includes Kick panels, worksurfaces and a mobile pedestal, a Turnstone storage tower and Details Slatwall and worktools, in a space design that reflects Heifer's approach of making the most of valuable resources:

- the tower provides plenty of storage in a small (24" X 24") footprint
- a shelf under the worksurface attaches to the panel and provides "hidden" added storage
- worktools organize and simplify work process, and improve productivity
- flat panel monitors that use less energy hang from monitor arms that free up worksurface
- each mobile pedestal has an upholstered top so it doubles as a visitor seat
- raised access floors route HVAC more efficiently than a traditional system
- material and finish selections are based on durability, low maintenance, and low VOC emissions
- daylight provides most ambient light, and task lights add light where it's needed

"They wanted to have a lot of flexibility in their workstations, and they have it. The ped and table are mobile. The table is rectangular, 24 by 48, and when it sits against the panel it looks great. They can easily reconfigure their workstations," says Trice.

This approach makes moves and changes easy. "If anyone has to move, we provide the boxes, they grab their mobile ped, and they move. We really simplified and standardized the whole process," says Erik Swindle, director of facilities management.

"I completely love Kick. It's a simple kit of parts. I have an asset system and I go through my dealer, but even a handyman can figure out how to install or reconfigure Kick."

A building with so much glass naturally welcomes the fading effects of sunlight. "Some of the paint on the sheetrock and the steel has faded. But the fabrics on Kick haven't."

To select task seating, "employees tried several chairs from several manufacturers. They had a lot to choose from," says Trice. Employee opinions were collected on comment sheets and the clear choice was the Think chair. "Everyone really liked Think best for comfort, usability, and of course its environmental story.

"The Think chair got top marks on all the criteria."

Many products are labeled "green," but Think has unsurpassed environmental credentials. It's the first product ever to receive Cradle to Cradle certification, a new design paradigm developed by McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry. The Gold certification recognizes Think's environmental design and materials that can be perpetually circulated in closed

"Everyone really liked Think best for comfort, usability, and of course its environmental story. The Think chair got top marks on all the criteria."

Korie Trice
Sr. Interior Designer
Polk Stanley



The Think chair was the first ever Cradle to Cradle certified product and holds gold level certification. You can disassemble the chair with ordinary hand tools in about five minutes. Created with McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry, only materials that tested safe to human and environmental health were selected.



loops. Think is also SCS Indoor Advantage Gold certified for indoor air quality, which means Think can contribute to LEED certification.

“The environmental story on the Think chair is something you can’t beat,” says Swindle.

To provide private spaces and meeting areas away from workstations, the building includes small huddle rooms on each floor. Large conference rooms are located at the center and on each end of the floors.

Heifer’s new workplace incorporates so many environmentally responsible strategies – recycled and recyclable materials, soybean and cotton insulation, and innovative water collection system, among other features– that the building was planned to pay for itself in ten years. It will probably beat that timetable by a wide margin.

“We’ve built other corporate office buildings and they’re pretty close to what was paid for this building, and they didn’t have the sustainable attributes this one has,” says Rowland.

The building was designed to use up to 55% less energy than a comparable building, yet Swindle says “we’re right at 51%, and we’re tweaking the systems every day. Eighteen months after we moved in, we’ve already paid for the lighting systems just from the lower light bills.”

“Our productivity has increased and our absenteeism is less of a problem because our workplace environment is much more appealing and staff-friendly.”

Erik Swindle
Director
Facilities Management

The US Green Building Council provided the Heifer headquarters with LEED Platinum certification, the nation’s most stringent sustainable building standard. Platinum is the highest certification awarded, and a rare achievement: only 57 new construction platinum projects exist. The AIA’s Committee on the Environment hailed it as one of the Top Ten Green Projects for 2007. The press and the

public have taken notice, and visitors tour the building daily.

“We’re still getting tons and tons of people coming in and out of this building. Sometimes you say, ‘do they realize this is just an office building?’” laughs Swindle. “But you see everyone’s expressions and they see everything that we’d done with this building, and you realize again that we have something special.”

More than just a special feeling, the Heifer workplace proves the benefit of an open, energizing workplace that respects the environment. “Our communication has picked up substantially. There’s no hiding in this building,” says Swindle.

“I’ve worked with HR, talked with all the managers. Every manager, director and VP has said, ‘we don’t have as much sick time.’

“Our productivity has increased and our absenteeism is less of a problem because our workplace environment is much more appealing and staff-friendly.”

Jo Luck says a sustainable building is a long term investment. "That's how we work with others around the world and how we worked on this building. The benefits –the ambience of the building, as well as the energy savings, and the health factors for the people here– those are all important. But we're realizing that there are some other major benefits.

"We're raising awareness and educating people about sustainability. People are amazed that recycled things are not ugly! The Rockefeller Foundation wants to build sustainably and they're coming to see our building. Dr. Muhammad Yunus, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, the president of Zambia, and many other dignitaries, have toured the building.

More than just a special feeling, the Heifer workplace proves the benefit of an open, energizing workplace that respects the environment. "Our communication has picked up substantially. There's no hiding in this building."

Erik Swindle
Director
Facilities Management

"We have a lot of partners in creating this building. Steelcase is one of our partners and we're excited about what they're doing with sustainability. Heifer is big on passing on the gift, and it takes partnerships to do that. This building is another way of passing on the gift."

Products used:

Turnstone Kick systems furniture, Jenny™, Uno™, Springboard®, à la carte™ & 319 Executive seating, storage products, and Groupwork products

Steelcase Wood Arbor casegoods & Convene™ tables

Steelcase Think® seating

Details® work tools, keyboard platforms, lighting, and sound masking

Photos © Timothy Hursley

Call 800.333.9939 or visit
www.steelcase.com

Despite the new building's size space is carefully used. There are fewer private offices and dedicated storage spaces. To provide private spaces and meeting areas, the building includes small huddle rooms on each floor. Large conference rooms are located at the center and on each end of the floors.

