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Escape from the planet of the cubicles

Over-the-top Office amenities are in high demand from millennials who seek a sense of community at work

Perking Spaces

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At **AWeber Communications'** Bucks County headquarters off Manor Drive in Chalfont, the company has three in-house gourmet chefs that whip up free organic meals with locally sourced ingredients every day, a yoga studio where meditation classes are taught, two indoor twisty slides and an outdoor area for pickup sports. The company held its first-ever cricket match with plans to make it an annual event.

At RJMetrics, which makes its home in 11,000 square feet in the Widener Building in Center City, the company maintains a corporate Uber account so employees staying late can get a ride home. It also subscribes to Seamless so hungry employees can get a meals delivered from Philadelphia restaurants — all on the company's tab. It also has a game room with table tennis, pool and foosball and regularly organizes night activities involving board games and other fun challenges.

And then there's Veva, a 425,000-square-foot office park in Blue Bell where **Keystone Property Group**, one of the area's biggest suburban landlords, has invested millions of dollars to put in a fitness facility, café and lounge, a conference center and an outdoor patio where people can hang out or work while enjoying a decorative water feature. At its Westlakes corporate campus in Berwyn, Keystone will incorporate many of the same offerings as well as outdoor seating area with a firepit overlooking a lake where tenants can gather for a beer and glass of wine.

Playrooms, composting and community gardens, so-called decompression spaces and napping rooms as well as allowing big and little dogs to come to work with their owners are among some of the amenities becoming common in corporate spaces.

These are not your father's cubicle-filled offices where the only perks lavished upon employees are the vending machines and coffee maker. Office landlords have moved away from just providing the basics and are packing offices with a wide variety of amenities. Companies are also stepping up and offering their own perks which, in combination with what the landlords are providing, are creating what is akin to miniature self-contained communities.

These offices are designed to attract and retain the best and brightest millennial workers who are migrating into the workforce and will in the future edge out baby boomers as the predominant group of employees. By 2030, millennials will make up 75 percent of the workforce, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and companies and property owners are reacting to that inevitability.

"There's a cachet to where you work," said [Joan Scott](#), a co-founder of D2 Solutions, an architectural firm that designs buildings for office developers as well as space for companies.

She walked out

Scott recalled a story recently told to her by the head of a company where a young woman arrived for a job interview and asked the head of the firm whether this was the space from where she would be working. When the executive said yes, the young woman — disappointed in what she saw — turned on her heels and walked out the door.

"It's unbelievable, but it's really what is driving these amenities. The environment matters," Scott said. "It's so competitive and they really care about the culture of the office."

For companies creating an environment that helps define the company's culture is important and goes beyond how a space looks and is used.

"A company's culture is not the Ping-Pong table but how people treat each other," said [Robert J. Moore](#), CEO and co-founder of RJMetrics. "We put a lot of energy into the perks because they are symptoms of a culture working well. We added Ping-Pong tables because we have a culture of people who love to spend time with each other and demand opportunity to be social with each other. They are a byproduct or result of a healthy culture."

[Sean Cohen](#), chief operating officer of AWeber, said the company had years of saved up wish lists from employees when it came time to design its headquarters. A lot of what got incorporated into the building was directed at making people happy.

"When you walk into a building and you're happy, it sets the tone for the rest of the day, weeks and month," Cohen said. "I'm pretty confident that seeing two twisty slides makes people smile. It puts a smile on their face and sets a tone for the environment. It's a place where people can have fun and let down their guard."

When Accolade, a health care company, went looking for new office space, the first building it looked at was 660 W. Germantown Pike in Plymouth Meeting. **Brandywine Realty Trust** had finished renovating the building and put in a large game room, deli, fitness area and conference room that the tenants could share.

"Everything we looked at paled in comparison for location and amenities," said [Elizabeth Napolitano](#), executive vice president at Accolade. When it designed its space, Accolade made

sure to have "serenity rooms" on each floor along with large pantries stocked with food and beverages among other amenities.

Recessionary impact

This trend to "over-amenitize" buildings is a shift for landlords.

Landlords started to pay more attention to the amenities they provided in their buildings during the recession when office vacancies were high, tenants had multiple choices and rents were comparable, said [Rija Beares](#), a broker with CBRE Inc. who represents tenants in their search for office space.

"You can take 10 choices within the same geography and take it down to five by looking at the amenities. It was a real differentiator," she said. "Even if there is a bit of a premium, people are willing to pay if their employees are happy."

Other factors are at play such as the death of the traditional eight-hour work day. While face-to-face collaboration is important, technology has enabled employees to work whenever and wherever. If employees are focused on something, firms don't want them to lose momentum by having them get in a car to go get something to eat or get a work out in.

"The way we work requires we have amenities near us so that we aren't breaking the cycle," Beares said.

In addition, by having on-site amenities, companies are able to shrink the amount of space they occupy since they don't have to carve out room for a large conference room or gym.

Creeping urbanism

Another dynamic at work is the "urbanization of the suburbs," said [Sergio Coscia](#) of Coscia Moos Architecture.

"It's all location-based," Coscia said. "If you're a landlord in the city, the amenities you would need to offer are already provided by the city. It's a bottom-up movement. It's not the landlord or tenants but the people the tenants want to hire and attract are demanding this. They want to attract young millennials. If you're out in the suburbs or in a place that doesn't have location or draw — places to eat, night life — you have to provide that in your building."

Even the office lobby is getting a redo and becoming more like something that one might find at a hotel, Coscia said. It's becoming more inviting, engaging and there are multiple places to congregate that have different kinds of seating with an upscale feel. "It's not just a place to stroll through but a place to inhabit," he said.

That's not lost on Keystone Property.

The real estate company recently hired an executive from **Hersha Hospitality Trust**, a Philadelphia real estate company that owns hotels nationwide. It also has retained **Floss Barber Inc.**, an architectural firm with a specialty in hospitality and entertainment, to help it with some redevelopment projects. The real estate company wants to make its buildings destinations rather than just a place where people work.

"There is a cost to it, but I think it is a cost we need to make and it's an investment in the future," said [Richard S. Gottlieb](#), senior vice president at Keystone. "It will make our buildings more desirable. It will help us attract and retain tenants. For our clients, they understand that it helps to attract the best and the brightest and it also makes them more competitive."

Companies also believe that the extra they may be paying in rent for on-site amenities as well as the perks they offer in-house are worth it.

"I think there are some pretty clear economics that go into a lot of these decisions," said Moore of RJMetrics. "Every one of these things is a well thought-out investment that goes to the health and well-being of our employees and our company. The [return on investment] is an absolute no-brainer."

Natalie Kostelni covers real estate and economic development.