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OLD WALMART REPURPOSED INTO LOVELY CALL CENTER IN TULSA FOR BLUECROSS

THE ENEREF INSTITUTE EXAMINES HOW GLARE-FREE COMFORTABLE LIGHTING CONVERTS AN ABANDONED WAL-MART INTO A CALL CENTER

An unfortunate consequence of Walmart's sales expansion in the US is that recently built, and perfectly good, retail stores are abandoned and replaced with nearby Walmart superstores.

The retailer's superstores have requirements an original Walmart store can't support. However, finding a new owner for an abandoned Walmart store facility has not been easy, as is evident by the number of Walmart store carcasses scattered throughout the US. Original

VISUAL COMFORT AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY WERE TOP PRIORITIES WHEN DESIGNING THE LIGHTING .

The Miro material allowed the light fixtures to both increase the quantity and the quality of light, while substantially reducing energy consumption.

Walmart stores are purpose-built, and the architectural renovations required to make a deserted store function well for new tenants can be expensive.

Health Care Service Corporation (HCSC), a leading provider of health insurance, found just such a Walmart facility stranded in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the company began successfully renovating the former store, repurposing the building into an attractive BlueCross call center. The insurance provider began their process by hiring the architectural firm ZPD+A of Chicago.

While plenty of design elements went into converting the Walmart store into a call center, Anthony Zahner, a Principal with ZPD+A, attributes much of their success to choices made by the lighting designer, Mitchell B. Kohn.

HCSC has developed a successful policy of repurposing big-box stores into office facilities, according to Jason Brown, Facility Manager for the company. And Brown

agrees with the architect's assessment that the high score the call center's interior environment received from their 500 BlueCross employees working in the renovated building was, in part, the result of the sophisticated lighting design.

"I have been in facilities management for 18 years and it's very unusual", Brown said of his complaint-free occupants. "I attribute the fact that we haven't had any complaints to the direct-indirect lighting", Brown said. "They absolutely love it".

BLUE GOES GREEN

Improving offices spaces for employees is just one of a number of successes HCSC points to among their socially responsible commitments. Today the insurance company is looking beyond the workplace, to socially responsible programs within the marketplace and community. And HCSC has implemented several programs to demonstrate their commitment to environmental sustainability.

The company's facilities have begun making more use of energy efficient lighting and building automation for heating and air conditioning. The company is using green cleaning products, green roofing and even employs storm water management systems.

HCSC has been especially aggressive in their recycling programs, including recycling used fluorescent light bulbs, wooden shipping pallets, used carpet tiles, used batteries, discarded aluminum cans and empty plastic bottles. But the paper recycling program is most visible. The company encourages maximum participation, particularly in conjunction with paperless office efforts. And the company further encourages employees by demonstrating their contribution with published environmental employee accomplishment statistics.

Today HCSC is also encouraging their BlueCross members to participate as well. While too few members opt for electronic EOBs (Explanation of Benefits), the company estimates if all members participated in their paperless websites instead of snail mail HCSC could reduce paper by 22 million pieces annually.

VISUAL COMFORT

The project's lighting consultant and designer, Mitchell B. Kohn, explained that visual comfort and



SPECULAR REFLECTORS USED IN FIXTURES

The specular reflective material offers two advantages that contributed to the design and energy efficiency.

energy efficiency were the top priorities in creating the new lighting for the repurposed Walmart. Kohn said achieving a “comfortable light level that was glare free” was done by using a reflective aluminum technology inside the Energie brand light fixtures Kohn had specified for the project.

SUCCESSFUL ELEMENTS OF THE LIGHT FIXTURES

Miro Aluminum used in many top-quality lighting fixtures is an extremely reflective optical surface that is also highly specular. Specularity is simply a measure of how closely you can predict the direction where reflected light will

bounce. The specular reflective material offers two advantages that contributed to the design and energy efficiency. First, material reflects nearly all the light created by the light in the fixture, thereby wasting very little energy. Secondly, because the the material is specular it allows lighting designers the ability to point light only where needed. A more diffused material would instead spread light in all directions, literally wasting energy by putting lighting where its not necessarily needed. Therefore, the Miro optical surface material allowed the light fixtures to both increase the quantity and the quality of light, while at the

same time substantially reducing energy consumption.

“We’re just finding the reflectors to be perfect” said Facility Manager Brown. “Were not finding it too reflective, we’re not finding it to be too under-reflective.”

A MODEL TO EMULATE

Although Health Care Service Corporation has converted other large empty box stores into BlueCross offices, this is the first such project in the Tulsa area. The model that Tulsa followed repurposes abandoned large box stores into, what HCSC calls, Full Service Units. However, reflective glare on com-

WITH 18,000 EMPLOYEES, HCSC BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD HAS A GREAT OPORTUNITY TO REDUCE WASTE

In 2012, HCSC recycled nearly 3,000 tons of paper; received their 12th straight Compliance Best Practice Award and Increased diversity within their workforce to more than 35 percent, according to their most recent report.

puter terminals is a problem common in such large open spaces, causing eye strain and fatigue. With the new optical technology, Kohn was able to create a visually interesting environment that added contrasts and depth while avoiding glare.

Kohn said that in order to create a glare free space with the best light distribution characteristics, “the Miro optical material was critical because of its very high reflective capabilities”. And for optimum performance, Kohn explained that Energie needed to “bend the material at exactly the right angles” so that the light output was appropriate and caused no glare.

Anthony Zahner of ZPD+A Architects, said the 120,000 square foot space is “Lit really well, very clean

and very efficient. Great overall luminosity”.

Brown says his job is to find fault with a space so that he can make improvements or squeeze more efficiency out of a space. But he explains he’s having a “hard time doing that” with the new lighting because he’s found no problems.

“I can’t say enough good things about it.” says Brown.

Research and reporting compiled and provided by Eneref Institute.

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