

# practice profile

## Making moves

Gettry Marcus creates the office of the future

BY TAMIKA CODY



Gettry Marcus' Sandra Devlopoulos (left) and Steve Marcus

### AT A GLANCE

**Firm**

Gettry Marcus CPA

**Headquarters**

Woodbury, N.Y.

**Managing partner**

Steven Marcus

**No. of partners/staff**

16/70

**Year founded**

1987

**Services**

Accounting, tax, consulting

**Industry specialties**

Construction, health care, professional services, real estate, wholesale – distribution and manufacturing

**When Gettry Marcus moved to new offices** this winter, they didn't just leave their old offices behind — they left the old idea of the office behind.

Following the vision that managing partner Steve Marcus had for what he calls his ideal firm of the future, the firm abandoned the traditional office set-up and replaced it with an open-floor concept. "Our goal was to improve the interaction and communication among our staff members," said Marcus.

Initially the firm was headquartered in New York City, but it moved to Long Island in 1998. By 2012, Marcus started to put his plan into action when he realized that the firm was experiencing a major growth phase. "We were growing at a rate of 15 to 20 percent a year and we were running out of space," he noted. Departments were scattered and isolated. "Communication-wise, it did not work well at all. While we were going through

this period of time, I was thinking about how the layout of a new space would work best for the firm as a whole." He was also thinking that it would be best to create a space that kept most of the groups together. He ended up with a space centered on communication and collaboration.

**TEAM BUILDERS**

Before Marcus could move forward with his ambitious plan, he needed assistance to figure out how to pull it all off. He tapped Gettry Marcus chief operating officer Sandra Devlopoulos to help keep his ideas in line and in focus, and Devlopoulos, in turn, tied in the vision for the new space with other initiatives surrounding the firm's reaching its 25th year in business. To mark the anniversary, the firm went through a rebranding. The new logo features three pillars, representing the firm's offerings — accounting, tax

and consulting services. "We wanted these three pillars to interact and work together, so we can work better as an overall team," Marcus explained.

"When we rebranded, we hired a company to help us rebrand and things just clicked from there," Devlopoulos said. Once the basic ideas were laid out, internal discussion with the partners and staff went a lot smoother, in terms of what Marcus had in his mind for the new office.

"The first step was that we had to find a space," she said. "When we started looking, there was an abundance of available space on Long Island." The vision was a lot of glass, a lot of windows, and a lot of light shining throughout the office. The search went on for about a year before they found what they were looking for. "As soon as we found the space in Woodbury, we knew this was it."

The second step was to find a design team



to design the space. Marcus tapped a designer he'd known before, California-based Jack Snyder. "I knew one day that I wanted to use him to help design our space," Marcus recalled. "He had to come to New York a few times during the process, and without today's technology, we wouldn't have been able to make that work."

Once the designer was locked in, the next phase was to pull in the architect of the property, which is owned by RXR Realty. The crew then sat down and sketched the layout of the new space. The process took nearly four months. "During the planning phase, we were doing so many other things in addition to looking at the architectural plans and searching for furniture vendors," Devlopoulos explained. "It was not a traditional move. Many times companies will look at office space and say, 'It pretty much fits our needs.' Not too many walls come down, ceilings stay the same and lighting stays the same. But we gutted the place down to the studs."

"Originally, I didn't want any offices," said Marcus. However, he was out-voted because the partners felt that the new space needed to have some offices. The partners compromised on glass offices, which fit Marcus' vision.

Another element of Marcus' ideal firm of the future was to have the color white throughout the majority of the space. When you walk through the office, you're surrounded by white walls, white desks, white filing cabinets and white chairs. However, the partner group, whose offices are set around

the perimeter, wanted to set themselves apart. Their desks are "river cherry," a shade of light brown. "The reason why we agreed to the light brown color in the partner offices is to allow our clients to see that we are a modern, different-thinking accounting firm, where we have fresh ideas but we still keep our traditional roots," explained Devlopoulos.

The cost of the build-out didn't come cheap. "When you do a build-out of a 20,000-square-foot space, you're talking about somewhere close to \$2 million," said Marcus. The firm didn't have to write a check up front for the total cost of the renovations. The landlord gave certain allowances and rate concessions, which are incorporated into the life of the lease.

#### PROS AND CONS

One of the biggest pros to the open-space concept is that Marcus got the collaborative environment that he wanted. The 70-person staff was skeptical about having an open-floor concept at first. "People thought it was going to be noisy, with too many distractions," said Devlopoulos, before explaining that the staff's transition has been "tremendous."

Another pro to creating the firm of the future is realizing how paperless a firm may or may not be. "Most accounting firms say they are paperless, but they're really not," Marcus said, noting that it's not until you move that you realize how much paper you really have. "It took us six months to clean our offices and get rid of all of the paper. When we moved into this space, we

had very, very little paper and files to transport. Our file room consists of folders, maybe a third of the size that we had before. There is very little in the file. That was one of the pros of moving — we truly feel like we are paperless today."

With all the open space and glass walls, Devlopoulos said that there isn't much room for privacy, which is an issue that the firm is trying to address. However, the firm's forensic accounting and litigation group is housed in a more private area of the space. This allows them a quieter area for meetings with attorneys and clients, and their own file space to secure confidential information. "It's not as open as the rest of the office. So there is some privacy that you can get going into that side of the space," said Marcus.

#### MAKE YOUR MOVE

There are a few things to consider when planning a move into an open-floor concept. The technology side of the project was particularly complex. Marcus emphasized the importance of mapping out telephones, computers and wiring. "Every firm is different and has different goals and specific needs. You've got to lay out what you want to accomplish," Marcus advised.

"This was not a small project by any stretch of the imagination," said Devlopoulos. "You need to have someone who is organized, can roll with the punches and can make sure to keep communications flowing between all parties. That was probably one of the hardest things to do. This project wasn't without its share of issues. But communication was the key to making

sure the project was completed on time, within budget and retained the vision."

The firm planned to hold an opening event in late June (after we went to press). While they invited clients, referral sources and community organizations, they didn't want it to be just a congratulatory event for the firm and its friends — they also invited a local nonprofit organization.

"We did some research identifying a nonprofit organization that we would be dedicating time and effort to. We will involve them in this first

event," said Marcus. Sunrise Day Camp, a local organization that provides camp and after-school facilities to children with cancer, is one of the first nonprofits the firm has on its list. "Our intention is to find organizations that want to use the space for events. We are not looking to rent out our space, but we are offering our space for their use, as part of our corporate responsibility." AT

For more, see our interview with Gettry Marcus' staff on AccountingToday.com under the ATTV tab.

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