



*The customized library reference counter includes wiring and shelving for three workstations and a phone so researchers can have all of their tools in one location.*

## Renaissance City Law Library Sees Rebirth of Its Own

### *Tighter Space, Split Facilities Compel Creative Solutions*

*by Kelly Devlin, Esq.*

Providence, R.I., has become known as the “Renaissance City” in recent years due to ambitious waterfront and business district development projects, which included everything from an upscale mall, convention center and hotels to moving the Providence River. The spirit of making everything old new again didn’t miss Hinckley Allen and Snyder LLP, a regional law firm founded in Providence in 1906.

Facing increasing lease costs and an office in need of a fresh look to properly project the image of an established corporate firm on the cutting edge, Hinckley Allen and Snyder LLP decided in 2001

to renovate their Providence office space. The firm’s partners decided to scale down their office to two floors from 2½ floors and maximize space through planning, design and new, more efficient systems furnishings.

Renovating and moving a commercial enterprise is no easy task. The firm’s director of administration, Leslie Adam, hired Andrew J. Dean, AIA, of the Boston architectural firm of Margulies & Associates and David Graham of Providence’s Graham Builders Inc. for design and construction, respectively. The firm’s partners played key roles as decision-makers and even as art consultants during the project, voicing concerns over security, efficiency and accommodation of new technology

#### **Cutting Down, Weeding Out**

During the planning process, the law library became a major concern. Not only did the library have to be relocated, but the size of the book and serial collections had to be radically reduced, too. Hinckley’s partners reasoned that the books related to certain practice areas should be housed on the same floor as those practice groups. That rationale drove the decision to split the library between two floors. As a result, Hinckley’s library administrative offices would be on one floor with resources for the litigation, health and real estate groups, while

the corporate and estate planning collections would be located on the floor above in a renovated file room with a counter and chair.

When it came time to plan for the new library facilities, Dean designed the new law firm spaces based on several of the firm’s assumptions about downsizing the law firm libraries and its resources. For example, because Dean stated that much of the legal research a law firm needs is now available online, many of its books could be discarded. Thus the need for a physical library would only diminish over time, he said. In addition, since Hinckley’s Providence office is only two blocks from the Rhode Island State Law Library, the firm library could depend more on interlibrary loans from that collection to supplement its own. Further, because law clerks would occupy newly carved associate office space instead of library carrels and counters, the library wouldn’t need much room for researchers. Lastly, with fewer books to maintain, the firm intended to keep library staff in the Providence office to one professional and one paraprofessional position.

As the library staff reduced its book collection by at least 20 percent during the renovation, shelf space was shrinking by more than 30 percent. The library had to severely cull out-of-date and unnecessary resources, and the firm had to purchase compact movable shelving systems to maximize library floor space.



*The director’s space includes seating for one guest so reference interviews can be conducted privately when necessary.*

Researchers in Hinckley’s new main library had to be accommodated, too. Out went the large wooden tables and chairs, and in came two computer terminals for online research and a large, custom-designed center island with seating. The main library also included a reading room for

researchers who prefer to work in the library.

Before any move could be executed, the entire Providence collection had to undergo a weeding process. The staff culled through the library’s materials for about four months. The library staff compiled long lists of books to be discarded, distributed those lists within the firm, and incorporated changes to the list based on input from the firm’s attorneys.

During this process, only one set of books was sold: A set of *National Labor Relations Board Decisions* garnered \$300. Many of the items were offered on librarian listservs for the cost of postage. The staff e-mailed the discard lists to local libraries, but few libraries requested the discarded items.

### Using Old Furniture, Creativity

However, transferring the collection was only part of the story. The firm was in an organized but transitional state during this period. Business still had to be carried out on a daily basis, even if construction was incomplete and furniture hadn't arrived. In particular, because the firm used the

tables were used in staff offices for storage and work space until new file cabinets and extended countertops arrived. The staff used online products in conjunction with e-mail and local printers to deliver information to the attorneys faster than ever before. The library still uses those methods today, even though oftentimes the information can be obtained from a book.



Each rolling carriage is fitted with pull-out shelving on both sides, which makes reading while in the stacks very convenient.

In the end, the "recycled" materials were not recycled. Rather, the library dumped 50 bins of dated library materials for \$10 per bin. Area recycling companies explained that recycling books is not cost-effective due to the bindings and glue removal.

After relocating the main portions of the collection, the discarding process continued over six months. The firm retained its extra half floor of space during that time so storage was not a problem.

In December 2001, the library staff learned that it would occupy its new space in a few days. Although the library would soon move into state-of-the-art surroundings, the move itself was fairly low-tech. With the help of professional movers, the staff packed giant orange plastic crates with personal items and loaded rolling bookshelves with the library materials. The freight elevator was the chief method of transportation between floors. Reshelving library materials proved time consuming because the materials were not cataloged in a recognized system. Still, staff persevered. It planned the layout of materials on the new shelving units and moved library materials and furniture with the assistance of the professional movers.

library's online resources frequently during the move, the library staff was challenged to provide the firm with a higher level of efficiency than ever before. Using old



Fifty green recycle bins full of print materials were discarded during the moving and renovation process.

furniture and creativity, the library staff continued to deliver library services as the legal staff provided legal services. For example, old movable files and typewriter

As is often the case in building and renovation jobs, completed construction and furniture installation ended up taking longer than anticipated. Hinckley's staff, architect and builder worked nights and weekends to stay on schedule, but unforeseen obstacles and unexpected changes delayed the move and construction on several occasions. Surprisingly, installing the right furniture in the correct place was the most time-consuming portion of the project.

For example, the rolling book-carriage installers worked periodically from December 2001 through the summer of 2002 to properly complete the installation. In February 2003, a year after the library move, the furniture for the library director's office finally arrived, along with the staff's much-needed cabinetry, tack boards, counters, file cabinets and office shelving. Staff offices were packed and unpacked on at least three occasions to accommodate the many deliveries and adjustments associated with the renovation and move. The planned library reading room never came to be: Library staff

increased by one just before the move, so the room is now an office.

Construction was finally completed in the fall of 2002. Despite the inconvenience, the renovation of the Hinckley Allen and Snyder LLP law library was well worth it. The entire Providence office is bright, efficient and wired with the latest technologies. Careful selections for surfaces, workstations, furniture and art came together seamlessly to demonstrate that Hinckley is an established and forward-thinking firm poised to assist its vast client base. The firm truly fits in with the rest of the Renaissance City.

*Kelly Devlin, Esq. (kdevlin@haslaw.com) is the director of library services at Hinckley Allen and Snyder LLP in Providence, R.I.*