

# COMMUNITY-BASED *planning*

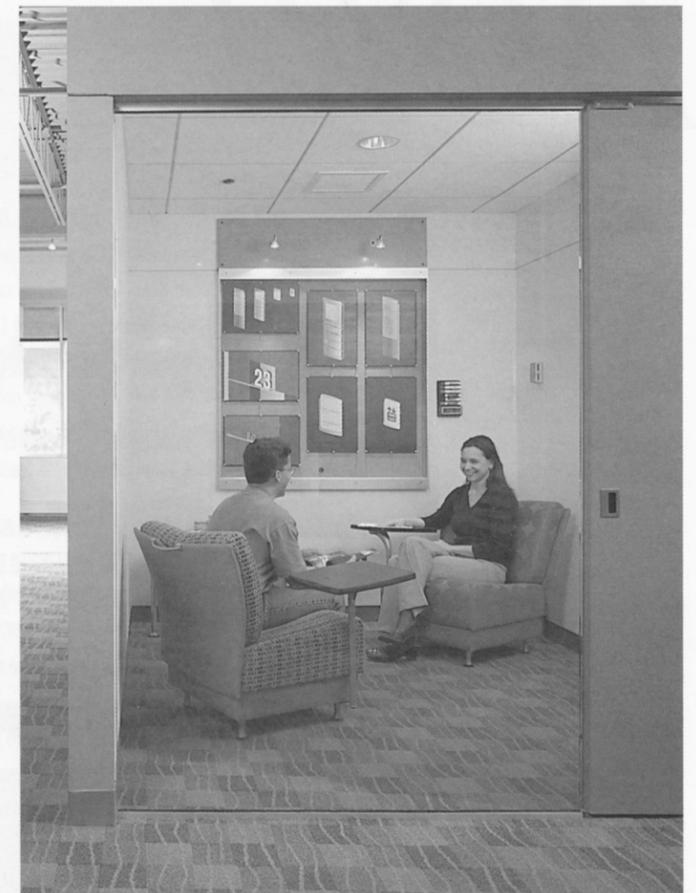
Communication Design Firm  
Agnew Moyer Smith explores new  
ways of collaborating at work.



*The "square" at Agnew Moyer Smith, a multi-purpose area with café, was designed to get people together to foster cross-pollination of ideas.*



*In the project room, the red ball—dubbed the Power Ball by staffers—is a patent-pending hi-tech boom with power, ethernet, sound and VTA connections designed by Agnew Moyer Smith.*



*This enclave, one of four in the new offices of Agnew Moyer Smith, features lounge seating used for quiet work space such as private phone calls or meetings.*

**A**t Agnew Moyer Smith, a communications design firm, the entire staff of 50 was the first group to be involved in a new concept of office design called "community-based planning" through their client, Steelcase, and the architectural firm Archideas of Chicago. Prior to their move to new quarters on the South Side, Agnew Moyer Smith underwent a series of exercises and observation for a period of around six weeks. "There were all kinds of exercises we went through," says Reed Agnew. "Group sessions, web-based tools, and photographs of things we liked and didn't like."

The purpose was to measure various dynamics within the firm to determine strengths and weaknesses in areas such as innovation, learning and decision making, work processes and communication.

"It's really about mapping the real relationship and processes going on that aren't really apparent," Agnew explains. The origin of the community based planning—which, he notes sounds more like an urban planning term—came from a female biochemist at Berkeley named Stevenson, who was studying organisms and their relationships. Curious, she started looking at the large human relationships and ultimately developed the mapping techniques used in the planning.

"One of the big findings was our workspace is a total reverse of most offices—forty percent is individual and 60 percent is collaborative," says Agnew. "With the high degree of technology, collaboration has to be effortless," he added. "We don't want to go the closet to get the projector." Now, plug-ins are in the ceiling and projectors can be used anywhere.

The new design resulted in new work patterns. "We started doing things in a very different way. We stay in meetings to work after the meetings. We use the whiteboard, and we start drawing," says Agnew.

As a result, "We're able to go through concept phases and work out ideas much quicker," he adds. "Anecdotally I know it's working. People don't like change," says Agnew, but their reaction to the new open space, which is the feature case study on Neocon this year, is very positive. "It's very different but everyone really likes it. I think it was very effective."

Soon, the post-move research will be finished and the results will be in.