

Initiative aims to make Calgary a world leader in telework

BY MARIO TONEGUZZI, CALGARY HERALD APRIL 20, 2010



Robyn Bews, project manager for Calgary Economic Development's WOR Kshift program, says Monday that Calgary Telework Week aims to help firms understand the benefits of flexible work arrangements.

Photograph by: Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald, Calgary Herald

CALGARY - In an effort to improve productivity, attract and retain employees, and sustain the environment, Calgary Economic Development has launched a telework initiative it hopes will become a world leader in the workforce.

With the launch Monday of Calgary Telework Week, the organization, through its WORKshift program, brought several city groups together to sign the Calgary Telework Charter -- an indication of their support for the initiative. Those organizations were Telus, ATB Financial, SAIT Polytechnic, the Calgary Police Service and Enmax.

"Many employers have already adopted a flexible work arrangement of some sort," said Robyn Bews, project manager for WORKshift. "This program is about raising awareness and encouraging

organizations to track their behaviour so they can fully understand the benefits and capitalize on the opportunity to incorporate the practice as one of their key business strategies."

According to economic development, research consistently reveals that employees who telework two days per week are 15 to 40 per cent more productive than their office counterparts.

Bews estimates that 10 per cent of Calgary employees are working outside the normal office environment one day or more a week.

Brad Harper, vice-president of Telus Workforce Solutions, said the company has adopted its own telework program because it helps employees better balance their work and personal lives, while reducing the impact on the environment.

"Telework gets our team more engaged and raises morale, which is good for them, and helps Telus attract and retain the best and brightest people," Harper said.

Calgary Telework Week includes a surprise public engagement activity promoting telework today between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Stephen Avenue S.W. in the 200-block. On Wednesday, Scott McNealy, co-founder and former CEO of Sun Microsystems, is giving a keynote address to business leaders, and on Thursday there will be a webinar to discuss the connection between technology and corporate social responsibility and the environment.

"The City of Calgary is already showing tremendous leadership in flexible work arrangements, and through WORKshift Calgary will differentiate itself to employees and employers while leaving a smaller environmental footprint," said Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart.

Bruce Graham, president and CEO of Calgary Economic Development, said surveys show that 42 per cent of Canadian employees could be lured away from their existing employer if telework were provided as an option.

He said 30 per cent of Calgary's commuting employees are desk-bound.

"That's a significant number of people. The adoption of teleworking initiatives will certainly improve the effectiveness and productivity of our workforce," said Graham.

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