



It looks like a North Texas resort but it's all business

Jason Wheeler, WFAA-TV 11 p.m. CST November 20, 2015

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(Photo: WFAA)

WESTLAKE — Tucked away on a ranch in Westlake, just a short drive from DFW Airport, is a 712,000-square-foot facility with 800 guest rooms.

It's called Deloitte University. Pete Sackleh, DU's managing director, showed News 8 around what looks like a resort.

It cost nearly \$300 million to build and features amenities like miles of bike trails on the ranch and a "fitness center extraordinaire" with more than 100 pieces of the latest gym equipment. Sackleh points out the enormous indoor/outdoor restaurant nearby to refill after the workout.

"We have everything from filet mignon to [...] vegetarian meatloaf," Sackleh said.

There's also an after-hours "barn" on property that has all the trappings of a well-appointed sports bar. The place even has its own sprawling Starbucks.

"And we serve a lot of it," Sackleh said. "In fact, I think we are the largest distributor of Starbucks in the region."

And it's all free: The hotel rooms, the recreation, the gym, the meals, and Starbucks coffee drinks you can swig. But you can't have any of it because this is not a resort after all, explains Sackleh.

"We invite you," he said. "You don't just show up at Deloitte University."

Deloitte, a global professional services firm, built the massive multi-purpose facility specifically to train Deloitte employees from all over. We dropped in on a day when new managers were being taught.

"They are learning very practical day-to-day skills they need," said Chris Whitlock, a director of strategy and operations with Deloitte who was brought in to teach this class.

Deloitte professionals-turned-students go through role playing workshops in dozens of classrooms, discuss innovative ideas in smaller breakout rooms and sometimes gather in grand ballrooms to hear from motivational speakers.

"President (George W.) Bush has been here a couple of times," said Sackleh.



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WFAA

Many large companies use traditional hotel conference centers to do this kind of mass employee training. And Deloitte still relies on some of those outside facilities as well. But because the company owns this facility, it is able to efficiently tailor its training methods, allowing Deloitte to develop about 60,000 of its employees at Deloitte University each year.

"This was an investment from the very beginning," said Sackleh. But he acknowledges it was not an easy sell to company leaders, saying "there were doubts." There was also a recession. The ambitious, expensive construction project started in 2009.

"At the depths of the economic downturn," Sackleh said. "But what we knew if that when that ended we needed to be in a position to attract and retain the best people and invest in them"



Peter Sackleh (Photo: WFAA)

The complex opened in 2011. Now, four years later, hundreds of thousands of company "students" have moved through, many of them clamoring to return.

"It is our home," Sackleh said. "That's how people see it."

Mortiz Brill, who works with Deloitte Consulting in New York in technology SAP analytics, said being at Deloitte University gives him the sense that the company cares about its employees.

The experience is intended to do more than re-train and retain what Deloitte has identified as its best and brightest. It's also about creating a bond between employee and company, and employee to employee.

The hotel rooms are well laid out, but there is no room service or pay per view movies. The company wants employees to interact in common areas rather than getting to comfortable in their individual rooms. In the restaurant, there are no tables for two. Group seating is encouraged.

And on an enormous touchscreen video wall, touted by our tour guide as the second largest such display in the Americas, employees can spin a globe to locate where everyone else who is at Deloitte University at that time came from.



A digital globe shows where the "students" come from at Deloitte University. (Photo: WFAA)

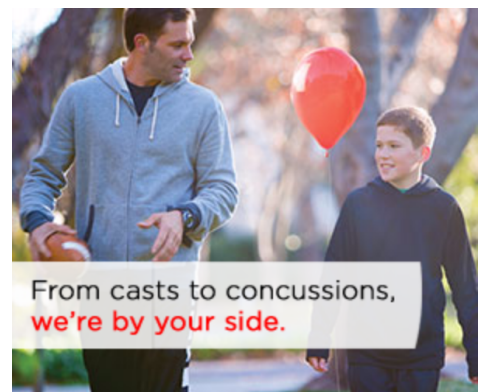
With all that interaction, and with so many design features aimed at getting employees to relax and recreate, some who come here say teambuilding seems to happen effortlessly and that work doesn't seem like work at all.

"It is so amazing and so interesting you want to come here. You want to do the training," says Brill.

Sackleh, who manages the operation, estimates that owning the complex is now saving Deloitte more than \$10 million a year.

"We have actually had a lot of clients and potential clients that have reached out to us," he said. He said other companies have been studying what is happening at Deloitte University as they consider creating similar campuses.

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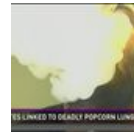
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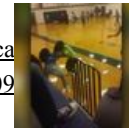
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