

## Dealer profile:

# Capital service for half a century

Johnsons Business Interiors is where Ottawa goes for one workstation or 100

Long before Ottawa's Byward Market became a zone of restaurants and upscale boutiques, it was where local businesses bought their office furniture. Back then, Johnsons was a well-known name in the market. Founded in the postwar years by Gray Johnson, G.H. Johnsons Furniture Ltd. originally supplied home furnishings and household goods. Later it expanded into party rentals and new and used office furniture. When Gray Johnson's son James took over the business in the late 1970s, he made office furniture the focus and forged close ties with the Feldberg family, owners of Global, and later Teknion.



As the Byward Market's character changed, what was by then called **Johnsons Business Interiors** relocated to 25,000-sq.-ft. showroom in an industrial park southeast of downtown. In 2006, James Johnson retired and sold the business to new owners with extensive experience in the office supply and

furnishings business in the National Capital Region.

Although the company's ownership has changed, its long-standing relationship with the Global Group and Teknion remains firmly in place, as does Johnsons' commitment to meeting the furniture needs of government, institutional and corporate clients of all sizes, while working closely with the design community. "We saw acquiring Johnsons as a great way to diversify our portfolio," says François Beauvais, who is part of the new ownership team. "This is an old company with good connections, and it has lots of opportunities to grow with the lines it carries."

### Comprehensive experience

Experience is certainly one of this dealership's strengths. Sales manager Adele Kiloran, for example, has handled office projects large and small in her 22-year career at Johnsons. Three senior staff members, design/furniture applications specialist Mardi Skuce, account manager Julie McEwen, and contract sales consultant to architects and designers Cathy Dempsey, have backgrounds in facilities, interior design, or both. (Cathy Dempsey is a member of IFMA's Ottawa Chapter.) Two other account managers, Dan Allard and Steve McCaw, have wide-ranging experience that includes considerable work on government accounts.

Among Johnsons Business Interiors' major clients are TD Bank, Carleton University, and numerous departments and agencies of the federal and provincial governments. Johnsons is a pre-approved vendor of record under the federal government's National Master Standing Offer program, and it is not at all unusual for the dealership to supply one hundred workstations to a client in a single order. But Johnsons also takes pride in providing quick turnaround and



Above and below: views of Johnsons Business Interiors

cost-effective solutions to small businesses. "Johnsons started an in-stock furniture program long before the big box stores," says Ms. Dempsey. "When someone needs furniture quickly, even if it's just one chair or a filing cabinet, what they often hear is 'Call Johnsons.' We have the resources to handle large orders, but we know we also have to appeal to the smaller companies. I think that's what keeps us busy – trying to appeal to everybody at a high service level."

In addition to Teknion and the Global Group, Johnsons represents a wide range of other Canadian companies. Rousseau, for example, manufactures high-density storage and shelving, an important product area for clients ranging from educational institutions to health care facilities. "Health care is a new growth opportunity for us," says Ms. Dempsey. "Health care isn't just hospitals – it's medical and dental clinics, it's long-term care facilities and retirement homes. The Global Group's GLOBALcare line addresses those kinds of requirements."

### Meeting needs and adding value

Meanwhile, Johnsons is meeting its customers' growing demand for information on sourcing environmentally responsible products. "Teknion and Global are leading the way in providing products with a green message," says Ms. Dempsey, "and particularly in larger-scale, new-build projects we're starting to see a big focus on environmental products and LEED certification." She now holds lunch-and-learn sessions on green topics for facility managers and designers. It's an example of how a dealership can add value to a manufacturer's product, and adding value has been and always will be the Johnsons way of attracting and retaining the business of its diverse mix of clients.