

Cubicles break down walls for some CEOs

The executives say they are glad to be closer to their employees and out of private offices

By Maggie Jackson
The Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Paul O'Neill looks around the huge office — replete with private bathroom, seven armchairs, couch and massive desk — that he gave up for a cubicle.

"I couldn't wait to get out of here," Alcoa's chairman says. "It was like living inside a mahogany box."

Plush corner suites remain the norm for most corporate chieftains, but a few are coming out of their wood-paneled boxes — and loving it.

They like bumping into employees informally or popping their heads over cubicle walls for quick chats — all the impromptu doings of business that people leave behind as they ascend the ranks.

"I would never go back to a private office," says Mark Serrienne, chief executive officer of Northlitch Stolley LaWarre, a Cincinnati-based advertising and public relations agency that took out all walls 15 months ago.

Now Serrienne talks with a handful of people just on his way to the bathroom. "The whole floor is my office," he says. "I think personally I'm more spontaneous."

Of course, even CEOs in a cubicle will get more coddling than the average employee. Just for starters, they'll get pestered across the cubicle wall less often than most workers will.

Their great praise for the change may also be partly because of boosterism; most leaders who abandoned offices do so as part of the growing number of design changes sweeping Corporate America.

Still, interviews with half a dozen company chiefs reveal an enthusiasm for the changes that seems to go far beyond public relations. They seem genuinely liberated.

"I'm delighted to come to work. I can't imagine a space that would be more creative," said O'Neill, who moved Alcoa's executives to a new floor two years ago to test an open-plan design to be used in the company's new headquarters opening in July.

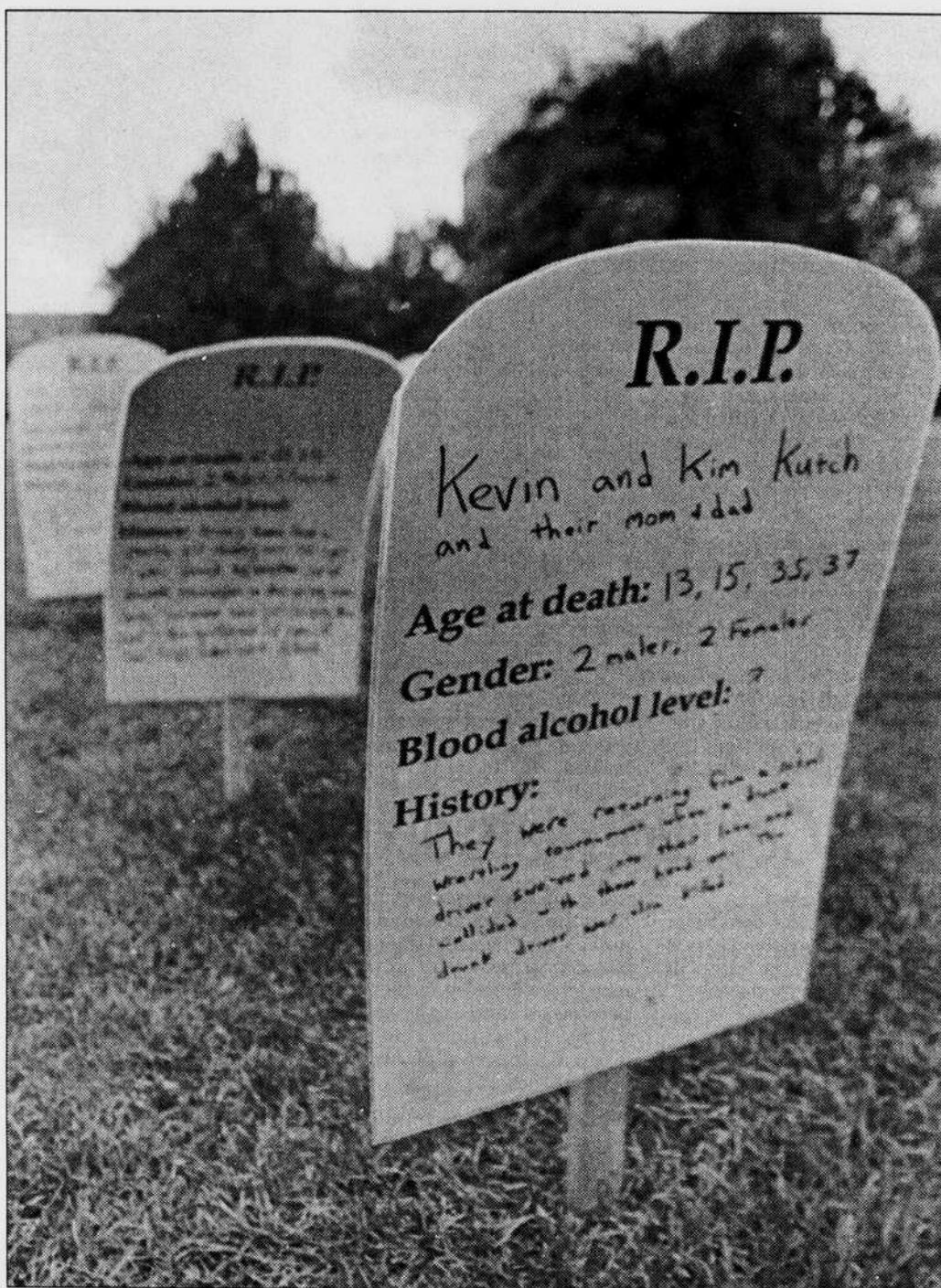
Bounding the few steps from his desk to that of the chief financial officer, he demonstrates how he hand-delivered a paper that morning that in previous times he would have tossed in the internal mail.

Still, while more and more executives are giving up their closed doors, they remain a tiny minority. Only 5 percent of upper management works in open-plan offices, up from 3 percent in 1994, according to the International Facility Management Association.

When Toledo, Ohio-based Owens Corning moved in 1996 to a new headquarters where few walls exist, CEO Glen Hiner switched to a glass-walled office in the center of the building.

But for now he still values his ability to close the door. "There are certain situations where accommodating privacy is a necessity," he said.

Grim Reaper Project



AMANDA COWAN/Emerald

The University Health Center set up tombstones in front of the quad on Tuesday in remembrance of those whose deaths resulted from drunken driving.

Check out Rhythm & Reviews in the Emerald every Friday for the latest in local entertainment!

A Robinson Theatre Production
William Shakespeare's
Two Gentlemen of Verona
May 22, 23; 28, 29, 30 June 5, 6, 8 pm
A special benefit matinee for Sexual Assault Support Services Sunday, May 31, 2 pm
UT box office 346-4191 EMU ticket office 346-4363

MCAT*
Get the Inside Word on Medical School Admissions from an Expert...
Free informational seminar with the former Assistant Dean of Admissions at University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, Maria Lofftus, JD
Date: May 27, 1998
Location: 720 East 13th #303
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Call now to reserve your seat 345-4420
KAPLAN
1-800-KAP-TEST
www.kaplan.com
*MCAT is a registered trademark of the Association of American Medical Colleges.

PLEASE RECYCLE



Twenty Years of Women's Voices
Thursday May 21st 8pm - EMU Amphitheater

Speak out against violence against women

- 20th Anniversary of Take Back the Night
- Starts at 8 p.m. Corner of 13th and University
- Local speakers and self-defense demonstration
- March ends downtown at the corner of 8th and Oak
- Visit the Clothesline project and info. display tables
- ASL Interpreted
- 9 p.m. Workshop in the Ben Linder Room with Jack Straton "The role men can play in ending sexual violence"

SASS
SEXUAL ASSAULT SUPPORT SERVICES

Organized by the ASUO Women's Center and Sexual Assault Support Services
Cosponsors: Eugene Weekly & UO Office of Student Life
For more info contact 484-9791