

Deal of the Week: Grown-up co-working space to land downtown

By [Nancy Sarnoff](#)

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A New York-based co-working company that develops shared office space for the suit-and-tie set - or at least the jacket-and-khaki set - has struck a deal with a local real estate investment firm to bring the concept to Houston.

Serendipity Labs Coworking, a 3-year-old company aiming to upgrade co-working's 20-something hipster image, will open in downtown's Esperson office development.

Houston-based Cameron Management, Esperson's owner, signed an exclusive franchise agreement with Serendipity for the Houston area, where it hopes to build 10 co-working sites.

While in some ways, the space will "feel like a big Starbucks," said Cameron CEO Dougal Cameron, "it's a place where the professional could be very comfortable."

Serendipity workspaces are meant to resemble five-star hotel lobbies. The company said its spaces have confidentiality and security systems in place for those whose industries require them to follow federal regulations like Sarbanes-Oxley and HIPAA.

John Arenas, CEO of Serendipity Labs, describes the concept as the "next-generation workplace" for those "who have made a little bit more progress in their career."

"Work has changed for everyone, not just millennials and not just the tech sector," said Arenas, former CEO of Worktopia and president and general manager of the Americas workspace company Regus.

He said the goal is to attract a multigenerational mix of "members" who pay monthly fees based on the space and amount of time they plan to spend at the locations.

Members have access to event space, a "worklounge," cafe and meet-up rooms for events and lectures.

Cameron estimates the cost in the Houston location to be around \$200 per month for someone who needs a place to informally use his or her laptop, make calls and access a conference room every so often. Those needing private offices could pay \$500 to \$600 per month.

Serendipity Labs has four workspaces open now and will have about a dozen more by year-end, some franchises and some corporately owned. For franchisees, the company provides brand, marketing and sales support, and the franchisee pays a royalty based on revenue.

Cameron Management plans to move its offices into the new space, which will total about 25,000 square feet, including about 9,000 square feet on the street level of 808 Travis.

Addressing the challenges of Houston's current economic situation, Cameron expressed confidence in the timing of the project.

"One of things that happens in Houston in a downturn," he said, "is whole bunch of people begin to get entrepreneurial."



Photo: Bob Luckey Jr., Staff Photographer

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