

Here's a look inside MassMutual's new 17-story Seaport building



By **Greg Ryan** – Senior Reporter, Boston Business Journal
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If Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Co. CEO **Roger Crandall** has any trepidation about opening a \$300 million, 310,000-square-foot building when most of his employees are still working from home because of the pandemic, he isn't showing it.

Springfield-based MassMutual held the grand opening of its 17-floor office tower at 10 Fan Pier Boulevard in Boston's Seaport District on Wednesday. The celebration included the requisite ribbon-cutting-with-giant-scissors, along with speeches from Crandall, developer **Joe Fallon** and Gov. Charlie Baker, glasses of champagne for employees, and Massachusetts delicacies such as Friendly's famous Fribbles.

The building has space for 1,000 MassMutual employees. At the moment, it has about 600 in the Boston area, roughly 200 more than it had when it broke ground on the tower in mid-2019.

That groundbreaking took place in a pre-Covid world. Crandall and his team wanted more space in Boston to better access the city's talent, particularly its tech talent. That thinking has not changed, he said, even if remote work has made it more tempting for those tech workers to live somewhere other than Boston.

"This is absolutely the kind of place people are going to want to come," Crandall said in an interview. "We actually built the ideal office for a post-pandemic world, not knowing there was going to be a pandemic. I'm completely optimistic this is going to work out great from that perspective."

While Wednesday was the building's formal opening, employees have been coming into the Boston office since mid-October. At this point, MassMutual employees are not required to report to the office. Crandall expects more will start making the trip in January, but they will still be able to work a hybrid schedule.



MassMutual CEO Roger Crandall at the grand opening of MassMutual's office in Boston's Seaport District.

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The office's perks are manifest. Each floor has open, collaborative space on the side of the building facing Boston Harbor, giving employees spectacular views of the Seaport and the Harbor Islands. (The desks are on the side facing downtown.) It has two terraces, including one on the top floor, a cafeteria, games including foosball and table tennis, and more. MassMutual is donating the third floor to MassChallenge, enabling employees to rub elbows with the startup accelerator's entrepreneurs.

MassMutual only made slight tweaks to the layout because of the pandemic. Knowing it was unlikely all employees would be in the building at the same time, the company added more of the collaborative spaces. In some meeting rooms, camera technology allows each participant physically present to have their own window in a Zoom or Teams session, so that those participating remotely are not staring at a single window showing the entire room. It had already planned on featuring private, gender-neutral bathrooms.

The tower has space for about 400 more employees, but at the moment, MassMutual is facing the same difficulties finding labor as other companies.

"I'm actually pleased that we're retaining most of the people, and I'm pleased that we're winning more often than not when we're recruiting. But it is a competitive world, without question, and we don't see that changing in the short run," Crandall said.

MassMutual is due to receive a \$46 million tax break from the state if it adds 2,000 jobs in both Springfield and Boston, in line with an incentive announced in 2018. However, Crandall said Wednesday that the rise of remote work during the pandemic has complicated that task. The company is currently in talks with state officials about its ability to meet future targets under the tax break. If MassMutual does not hit the targets, it may not receive the full incentive.



Gov. Charlie Baker admires MassMutual's new Seaport building while speaking with MassMutual CEO Roger Crandall.

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Asked if he was concerned about the possibility of falling short of the 2,000-job number, Crandall said he doesn't think about it much.

"We continue to grow. If we continue to grow, we're more likely than not to get it. But if we don't, we don't. It's not like that was the only reason we decided to invest over \$500 million in Massachusetts. It was a piece of it, but it wasn't the only reason," he said of the tax break.

As for Crandall himself? Since the soft opening in October, he has been at the Boston office a couple of days a week, he said. He is trying to get his senior leadership team together in Boston at least once a week.

"Mostly we've been doing it here just because we've got a few more people here," Crandall said of hosting the weekly leadership meetings in Boston rather than Springfield, adding that he has hosted a few get-togethers at the Springfield headquarters as well.

Meeting in-person has brought the benefits that so many executives say they miss, according to Crandall.

With online meetings, "I can't stop you on the way out and go, 'Wait a second. I don't quite get that, can you say that again?' or 'Hey, I thought of this.' Instead, it all goes click (and) goes away," he said.