

Springs attracted 14 firms in 2004

Moves will bring 2,000 jobs; other companies will expand

By WAYNE HEILMAN THE GAZETTE

Plenty of available workers and buildings for sale or lease have attracted 14 employers to set up shop in Colorado Springs, and several established businesses have announced expansion plans in 2004.

In all, those employers plan to hire more than 2,000 in the next several years.

That makes 2004 the most successful year for economic development announcements in the Springs since 2000, when the local economy was booming, said John Cassiani, executive vice president for marketing at the Greater Colorado Springs Economic Development Corp.

"This is the first year in the last three we have had job growth, and we were able to meet our goal of attracting 2,000 jobs for the first time since 2001," Cassiani said. "It's been a long time since 14 companies have decided in the same year to come here."

EDC has been able to attract employers using the same sales pitch it did during the early 1990s, when it touted inexpensive real estate and a well-educated work force to attract two major employers that helped lift the city out of a recession.

"What we are selling is we have available buildings and work force," Cassiani said. "We tell (prospects) that this is the time to make the decision to come to Colorado Springs because we have well-priced buildings for sale or lease and available workers who need jobs."

The number of jobs planned by the 14 companies — 2,036 — is up more than 60 percent from 1,270 jobs planned by five companies that moved to the Springs during 2003. Two years ago, four companies moved here in the midst of a recession with plans to hire 260 people.

EDC honored the 14 companies that moved to Colorado Springs this year, eight others already here that expanded in 2004 and the U.S. Olympic Committee for its contributions to local economic growth during a reception Wednesday at The Broadmoor hotel.

Here are the companies that have announced this year that they will move to or expand in Colorado Springs:

c The California State Automobile Association is moving its claims processing center from northern California to Colorado Springs and will employ 500 by 2007.

- Progressive Insurance announced plans in June to add a data center and information technology operation, which will employ 374 within two years, to its Colorado Springs call center.

- Computer Generated Solutions Inc. acquired a technical support contract in March from Hewlett-Packard Co. and hired many of the center's employees. The company expects to employ 360 locally by the end of 2006.

- Configuresoft Inc., which designs and sells systems management software, moved to the Springs from Woodland Park with its 105 employees and plans to expand to a staff of 300 by 2009.

- Westwood College Online opened a service center in Colorado Springs last month that employs 57 people and expects to add 73 others through next year.

- Ace Hardware Corp. is planning to add 63 employees to its 225-person staff in the next five years to staff a 225,000-square-foot expansion of its Colorado Springs distribution center.

- EFT Source Inc. expanded to the Springs in June to imprint and encode Visa and MasterCard credit and debit cards and plans to employ 50 by 2009.

c Provident Pharmaceuticals LLC opened its doors this year and will begin making prescription and over-the-counter drugs early next year, with plans to employ up to 20 by the end of next year.

- Focus Publications — which provides marketing tools to the title insurance, mortgage and real estate industries — moved to the Springs from California earlier this year and plans to employ 15 by year's end.

- Sharene Sportswear Inc., which makes figure-skating apparel, moved to the Springs in March from San Diego and plans to employ 15 by the end of 2005.

c FedEx Ground is relocating its trucking operations to a 54,000-square-foot terminal, where it plans to add 12 people to its staff of 43 employees and 35 contract workers.

- Barrios Technology Ltd. opened an office in the Springs in October that will employ 10 within a year to gain more contract work in military space support.

- Empirical Testing Corp., which tests medical devices, moved to Colorado Springs from Ohio in September and plans to employ eight by the end of 2006.

- Intel Corp. plans to hire several hundred people by 2008 after building out the unfinished half of its semiconductor plant.

- USAA Insurance added 125 employees earlier this year in its policy service and claims staff to handle growth of its western U.S. membership base.

- Checks Unlimited plans to hire 100 people as it consolidates work from a closed Alabama plant.

- Current Inc. bought the Colorful Images brand from Concepts Direct Inc., bringing about 100 jobs to Colorado Springs from Longmont.

- Directed Energy Solutions is developing a laser for the aerospace industry and plans to add 47 jobs by the end of 2006.

- Navsys Corp. plans to hire 40 more people by the end of next year to handle its backlog of contracts for global positioning system products.

- Dalsa Corp. moved its research, development and manufacturing operations to the Springs from Arizona and added 25 jobs.

- Springs Fabrication Inc. has grown to about 100 employees to complete a variety of metal fabrication products for various industries.