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### Recruiting strategy helps Durant land 400 jobs

by David Page  
The Journal Record  
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DURANT – When the Durant Industrial Authority identifies a new economic development prospect, it puts together a team of area business and civic leaders.

The concept, known as Team Durant, was created nine years ago and has most recently helped the city land a new call center – and the 400 jobs that come with it.

A new team is created for each potential project, with membership based on the requirements and skills needed to attract the prospect, said Tommy Kramer, executive director of the authority.

“Team Durant consists of community leaders that come together at the beginning of a project to make it a reality for completion,” Kramer said.

The latest in a long streak of victories for Team Durant was announced Thursday.

PRC, based in Plantation, Fla., will open a new call center with 400 jobs. PRC, which provides outsourced customer service, will be offering jobs in management, customer support and technology.

“The employment opportunities offered by this outstanding company are a perfect match for our well-trained work force, and we look forward to a long and profitable partnership,” said Jerry Tomlinson, mayor of Durant.

The unemployment rate for the Durant local labor market was 3.5 percent in October, down from 4 percent a year earlier, according to the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission. Durant’s labor force totals 39,740 workers.

PRC has around 14,000 employees in about 20 calling centers, including 10 facilities in Florida and six in Iowa. Clients include British Airways, DirectTV, US Airways, and Sprint.

“With the many attributes that Durant has to offer, we feel this is an ideal community to deliver results for the Fortune 500 clients we support, and we are looking forward to completing our hiring,” said



John G. Hall, PRC's CEO.

PRC was founded in 1982.

"There is no doubt the proven track record and stability of this company will make it one of our leading corporate citizens," Tomlinson said.

During 2005, PRC employees raised more than \$120,000 for local charities including Habitat for Humanity, the American Red Cross and United Way.

Patricia Benitez, who has been a Durant resident for 11 years, will be general manager of the call center.

PRC will be in the same 63,000-square-foot facility with NexxLinx of Oklahoma, said Kramer of the Durant Industrial Authority. Benitez was formerly with NexxLinx.

NexxLinx was an earlier victory for Team Durant.

The Atlanta-based company opened the customer service center in 2000 and had 300 employees in September when it announced plans to double employment.

The facility being used by NexxLinx and PRC is owned by Durant natives Ron and Tami Cross.

The building is a town within the town. It houses a food court, convenience store and a privately owned day care center.

"Employees can bring their children and check them into the day care center," Kramer said. "With the food court and convenience store, they never have to leave the building."

For the Team Durant concept, Kramer said he works closely with Tomlinson, City Manager Paul Buntz and Paul Cathy, chairman of the Durant Industrial Authority.

The Big Lots Distribution Center, which has about 500 employees, was one of the largest victories for Team Durant. The Columbus, Ohio-based closeout retailer built the 1.2 million-square-foot facility in 2003.

During 2006, Team Durant recorded a victory streak including retail, industrial, housing and lodging wins.

Icon Construction, based in McKinney, Texas, began construction on a facility in September where 200 employees will build commercial modular buildings. Icon's 75,000-square-foot manufacturing facility is being constructed near the Big Lots Distribution Center.

Retail additions during the year include a new Lowe's, Chili's, a Sonic drive-in and Chicken Express, which opened its fourth Oklahoma restaurant in Durant.

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, another major employer in Durant, added 60 rooms to a motel across from its casino.

A 42-room Best Express Inns and Suites opened earlier this year,

and a 60-room Microtel is nearing completion. Construction is expected to start in early 2007 on an 80-room Hampton Inns and Suites and a 100-room Holiday Inn Express.

Durant's population is expanding along with the new jobs.

"If you create good-paying jobs with good benefits, people will come to the area," Kramer said.

PRC's benefits include medical and dental insurance, dependent and health care flexible spending accounts, life and disability insurance, a 401(k) retirement plan with employer match, and tuition reimbursement.

Demand for housing has also grown.

A 300-unit apartment complex near Southeastern Oklahoma State University was recently completed and is fully occupied, Kramer said.

Another 208-unit apartment complex is scheduled to open in January. ERC, based in Fort Smith, Ark., is building a 64-unit apartment complex and seven homes. ERC earlier built a 95-unit apartment complex in Durant.

"We are keeping up with the housing demand as we create jobs," Kramer said.

Southeastern Oklahoma State University provides an economic advantage for Team Durant. NexxLinx actively recruits students at the university.

"The university was one of the key factors when I recruited NexxLinx seven years ago," Kramer said.

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