

Microsoft opening Lehi office

Economy » The software development giant brings 100 new jobs that will boost state's high-tech sector.

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Lehi » It's only 100 new jobs --- but they are 100 jobs in the midst of a severe economic downturn, 100 jobs that pay a lot more than the Utah average and 100 jobs from Microsoft.

The world's largest computer software company announced Wednesday it is opening an office in Lehi just across the Salt Lake County line, where it will initially employ 100 engineers and other software developers.

Though the office is relatively small, Microsoft's decision adds momentum to Utah's vibrant high-tech industry, which is seen as one of the state's engines of economic growth.

Paul Mayfield, Microsoft's director of engineering and a 1997 graduate of the University of Utah, said the engineering programs at the state's universities, the number of high-tech companies already here and a good business climate contributed to the decision to open the new office.

"You take the combination of strong education, strong existing talent pool and a supportive government, and it makes a lot of sense to open up sites and continue expansion and our commitment to the state of Utah," said Mayfield, who lives in Alpine and will work out of the Lehi office when it opens, probably in August.

Mayfield also said the location at Thanksgiving Park and next to the planned first stop for commuter rail in Utah County provides access to potential employees from both counties, making it a "very attractive site."

Lt. Gov. Gary Herbert, who will become governor soon if, as expected, Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. is confirmed as ambassador to China, praised Microsoft's decision to locate jobs that will pay more than Utah's average of \$45,000 a year in household income. Herbert said he will continue Huntsman's emphasis on economic development but he downplayed the role of government in creating jobs.

"We know government doesn't create jobs. It comes from the private sector," Herbert said. "We want to make sure government is not intrusive in that opportunity in a free market. We want to make sure government stays off your backs and out of your wallets, and lets that small-business, entrepreneurial spirit flourish."

But Herbert also cited the need for a well-educated work force as a key to attracting good jobs to the state. Government "can certainly help facilitate a fertile field," he told reporters after his prepared remarks.

Microsoft has about 90,000 employees worldwide and already has an office in Draper that focuses on Microsoft's Office products, a sales office in Salt Lake City and other support functions in the state.

The state did not provide financial incentives to the company to open the Lehi office.

But Utah County will bestow some benefits should Microsoft keep wages high and remain open seven to 10 years, said Commissioner Gary Anderson.

Jason Perry, head of the Governor's Office of Economic Development, said the decision adds "critical mass" to the state's drive to attract technology companies because of Microsoft's prestige and because of companies already here.

Perry cited the presence of IM Flash, Oracle, eBay and Disney, "all of these people in this industry who

started feeding each other. It's started drawing talent and also helps ensure we take advantage of the talent we're growing here. You need a mass of people to make it work."

Mayfield said Microsoft's Lehi office would focus on virtualization, software that allows various networks, servers, programs or devices to run on a computer. Virtualization is seen as a growing area of software sales.

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