



Cingular announces plans to build call center

By Melissa Dunson

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With donated land and the formal commitment of tax incentives, Joplin will be the home of a new Cingular Wireless call center.

The announcement was made during a news conference Wednesday at the Joplin Chamber of Commerce office. John Dwyer, vice president for business customer service with Cingular, said the center, to be located in Silver Creek Galleria complex, will employ 500 to 600 people. He said the majority of the jobs will be new, with only a small percentage being transferred from other company operations.

Dwyer said that along with a starting hourly wage of \$9.50 will be a benefits package that is "more than competitive." It will include an employee tuition-reimbursement program.

The agreement is contingent upon approval of state and city tax breaks, plus the Joplin City Council approving nearly \$1 million in infrastructure work for streets and the base pad for the building. Mayor John Tupper said he is confident that the council will approve the infrastructure work because it will make the area more attractive to other businesses and developers in the future.

Tax incentives that Cingular is in line to receive are 100 percent elimination for 10 years on property taxes and 100 percent elimination for five years on equipment taxes, as well as \$1.5 million in building bonds and \$1.5 million in job training.

Dwyer said the company hopes to open its doors in the third quarter of 2007. He said he didn't know how much it would cost to construct the building. The Joplin center would handle inbound calls from business customers seeking technical service and general customer service.

The property development will be done through Norcross, Ga.-based Adevco Corp., which has built centers for Cingular in the past. Adevco will construct and then lease the building to Cingular. The company plans to conduct its environmental and engineering assessment of the site within 30 days.

The 10-acre site for the 75,000-square-foot center was donated to the Joplin Industrial Development Authority by longtime local developers Fannun Kanan and Richard Joseph. They own the 165 acres in the Silver Creek Galleria, south of Interstate 44 and immediately west of Range Line Road. Joseph said he and Kanan offered the land to the city years ago to build a convention center. Tupper said the city never took the developers up on the offer because the tax incentives and construction plans never lined up before.

Joseph said donating the land benefits both the community where he has lived for the

past 40 years and his other businesses in the Silver Creek Galleria, including restaurants, motels and retail outlets. The 600 Cingular employees will need restaurants, lodging and shopping, he said. He said he wasn't sure about the value of the donated land, but that several years ago he sold some adjacent land for \$10 a square foot.

The economic impact of the call center will be significant, Tupper said, with added sales-tax dollars going to the city from more people shopping, eating and living in Joplin.

"I don't think people realize the sheer impact this kind of employer could have," Tupper said. "It will affect traffic, hospitals, schools."

Work on the project began more than a year ago, Tupper said, when Cingular approached the chamber about a possible location in Joplin. Rob O'Brian, chamber president, said he first looked at existing buildings for Cingular to occupy, but after not finding one that met the criteria, he began looking into land options.

Dwyer said the list of possible sites started out with 50 to 60 cities, and was narrowed to five finalists before Joplin was chosen, contingent on the tax breaks. Dwyer said the company was interested in the Midwest because Cingular is trying to move its customer-service centers out of metropolitan areas and into smaller markets.

"We looked at the Joplin market," Dwyer said. "The demographics are good. The cost of living's good. But more than that, it's the work ethic of the people here and the available work force."

Melissa Dunson is the business writer for The Joplin Globe.

Hourly pay

Cingular says employees can expect to start at \$9.50 an hour, giving the company an annual payroll of more than \$11 million.