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## AT&T plans to increase hiring at call centers in Nevada

By JOHN G. EDWARDS  
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AT&T is giving local workers and economic development advocates a strong tonic for hard times in Southern Nevada.

The telecommunications giant on Wednesday announced the opening of a Las Vegas call center that will employ 350 workers earning in the low to high \$20 per hour range with full benefits.

The company payroll will total \$9 million yearly, said Howard Lenox Jr., president of AT&T in Nevada.

AT&T already employs 80 workers at the new facility at 10550 W. Charleston Blvd., Lenox said. The workers will help AT&T customers around the country connect and maintain high-speed Internet service.

The company will increase employment to 350 by June, he said, and plans to open a call center in Reno in February that ultimately will employ another 300, bringing the total number of AT&T jobs in Nevada to 1,850.

The Las Vegas center is the ninth AT&T call center of this type opened since 2007. Four more, including the one in Reno, are scheduled to open by the end of next year.

"The state Legislature has been good to us, and the state is good to us," Lenox said. "This is a state that believes in and encourages and promotes competition."

AT&T also likes the pool of potential employees in Nevada, he said.

"AT&T is committed to bringing jobs back to the U.S., and this center in Las Vegas is an example of our belief in the American work force and the need to bring these jobs to our local communities," David Condit, AT&T president of state and legislative affairs, said in a statement.

The company said the Las Vegas jobs are among 5,000 positions that earlier were outsourced, many to offshore locations.

The Las Vegas area is starting to attract inquiries from companies served by overseas call centers, said Somer Hollingsworth, chief executive of the Nevada Development Authority.

Foreign workers cost less to employ but don't understand the language well.

Overseas call center workers encounter problems if they aren't following a script or hear regional slang, Hollingsworth said.

"It just plain wasn't working," Hollingsworth said.

AT&T's pay scale will set a new high mark for call centers, he said.

Citibank opened Las Vegas' first major call center in the mid-1980s, showing employers that area work force skills weren't limited to casino operations, Hollingsworth said. The bank call center provided customer services for credit card users.

Las Vegas' telecommunications infrastructure and the availability of land needed for large employee parking lots make the area attractive to call center operators, Hollingsworth said.

Workers don't need college or technical degrees to get jobs at the AT&T center, Lenox said.

AT&T is looking for individuals interested in technology and customer service, he said, and will train them over four to six weeks.

Lenox said the company offers opportunities for advancement, noting that he started 30 years ago as a telephone operator.

AT&T doesn't offer high-speed Internet service to consumers in Las Vegas because Embarq Corp. is the major local telephone company in Southern Nevada.

However, AT&T is the major provider in Northern Nevada and also provides wireline Internet service to businesses in Las Vegas, and also wireless service to consumers and businesses here.

"We like the idea of putting folks to work in the communities we serve," Lenox said. "This is really a landmark investment in Las Vegas."

The company has spent about \$5 million on improvements needed at the building it leases on Charleston Boulevard. AT&T has invested \$160 million in equipment and infrastructure in Nevada, including wireline and wireless services, since 2006.

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