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Published October 24, 2005

**SPRINGFIELD ECONOMY »**

## **T-Mobile call center bringing 700 new jobs**

*Company promises jobs starting at \$9.50 plus benefits.*

**By Karen E. Culp**  
News-Leader

T-Mobile USA announced this morning that the company plans to open a customer service call center in Springfield and create 700 jobs by mid-2006.

It was one of the largest job creation announcements in the city's history and puts the wireless telephone company among the top 25 employers in Springfield.

The full-time jobs taking calls from T-Mobile's customers will pay \$9.50 to \$11 an hour plus benefits.

"Springfield's been a site that's been on our radar for a while," said John Birrer, vice president of customer service operations for T-Mobile USA Inc., which is based in Bellevue, Wash. "One of the things I do when we're looking at a market is I look for kind of the intangible quality, what's the attitude when you walk into a restaurant and into a store. Is there a friendly feel?"

"I absolutely got that feel when we were in Springfield and in the area. And that's the kind of service we want to give our customers."

The call center will be at the northeast corner of Kearney Street and West Bypass, in the Airport Plaza development. It will be T-Mobile's 19th U.S. call center. The company is building new call centers to respond to its growing customer base, which now numbers about 20 million.

Though 700 jobs is its initial estimate, the center could grow to 820 employees, Birrer said.

At 700 employees, T-Mobile would be tied for the 24th largest employer in Springfield's five-country metropolitan statistical area, equal to Loren Cook manufacturer. If the company grows to 820, that will put them at No. 20, just behind Willow Brook Foods. The Springfield metro's two largest employers are CoxHealth, with 8,600 employees, and St. John's Health System, with 7,900 employees, according to the Springfield Business and Development Corp.'s latest information.

"We're pretty excited about T-Mobile selecting Springfield," said Ryan Mooney, manager of business development, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce. "We feel the job creation is significant, and the company is a good fit for our already strong customer service market in Springfield. We have a growing job base here, and T-Mobile recognized that and wanted to be a part of it."

Right now, Airport Plaza is home to a convenience store, a hotel and offices for TSA. T-Mobile was ideal for a 10-acre tract of the 66 acre Airport Plaza that is near I-44, said developer Kevin Carleton.

"We held that 10 acres for some kind of desirable tenant, and this is a good fit," Carleton said.

T-Mobile's customer service jobs are not the first of that type of job to come to the Springfield market.

Chase Card Services has a customer service call center here that is to employ more than 1,500 by next spring, and SBC has about 350 customer service jobs in its Springfield operation, said Pat Bly, regional director.

"We've expanded our call center here for all the same reasons T-Mobile said it's coming here," Bly said.

John Birrer, vice president of customer service operations for T-Mobile, said about 95 percent of the employees at the center will come from the Springfield area. The company will appoint a center manager, who could come from within the corporation.

"That's a key role for us," Birrer said. "We don't have anyone selected at this point."

Unlike other companies that are moving call centers offshore to save money, T-Mobile has chosen to stay in the United States, Birrer said.

"Those are really efforts to move jobs to India in order to save costs, but we don't believe the quality is as high," Birrer said. "We want to keep these jobs in the United States."

Call centers have had some success in the city. Another customer service call center, then called First Card, opened in Springfield in 1998, saying it would bring about 250 jobs. Since then, the call center's name has changed to Chase Card Services, and earlier this year, it announced it will employ 1,550 total by March 2006.

In addition to mobile phone service, T-Mobile also provides Wi-Fi wireless computer networks at more than 6,000 spots throughout the country, including many Starbucks Coffee Shops.

With these jobs also comes a number of amenities at the new 77,000-square-foot call center, including a workout facility, game room and cyber cafe.

"We want to create a comfortable and fun place to work for customer service representatives," Birrer said.

The center will be open from 6 a.m. until midnight; employees will work various shifts within that time frame.

T-Mobile is also careful not to place onerous call-volume requirements on its customer service personnel, asking them to take the time necessary to answer customers' questions and solve their problems.

These employees won't be telemarketing or selling services, Birrer said.

"The only way we can win in the marketplace with three competitors is by paying attention to our customers and our customer service representatives, keeping their knowledge and so forth up so they can help those customers," he said.

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