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500 WORKERS TO BE HIRED »

SunRocket to open Springfield call center

Company plans to hire 500 workers, including former MCI employees.

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Two months after MCI announced its plan to close its call center in Springfield and lay off 400 workers, another phone company is swooping in to snatch the talent and experience of former MCI workers.

SunRocket, a Vienna, Va.-based Internet phone service company, announced that it will open its first U.S. customer call center in the former MCI building on Primrose Street in August and hire 500 workers by the year's end.

"We're very excited about being in Springfield," said Brian Lustig, spokesman for SunRocket. "There's a really talented group of employees and a great leadership team."

For Jim Anderson, president of the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce, the news is uplifting.

"To fill the building with employees, so to speak, in a short period of time is a great testament to the work ethics and productivity of people in our region," Anderson said Thursday evening.

MCI acquired by Verizon this year announced in late April that it would close the Springfield call center, along with centers in Iowa, Texas and South Carolina.

The Springfield call center caught the attention of officials of SunRocket, a fast-growing company that wanted to open a customer support center.

The reason: Because the Springfield center has been a top-performing location for MCI, Lustig said.

"It's a pretty unique opportunity for SunRocket to gain the talent, the experience and the passion of individuals there and the leadership team there," said Lustig, noting both founders of SunRocket had worked for MCI.

So had Michael Barker, senior vice president of operations for Bell Industries, a California company that has partnered with SunRocket to reopen the former MCI call center.

"The call center historically had fantastic results for MCI," Barker said. "SunRocket wants to leverage the experience of the agents and the management to provide quality service for their customers."

Workers at the call center will be on the payroll of Bell Industries, but the center will provide customer support service only to SunRocket, Lustig said.

Bell Industries has offered all former MCI workers the jobs with the same or better pay and

comparable benefits, said Barker.

An employee at MCI would start at \$7 an hour, Barker said, and SunRocket offers a starting pay of \$8 per hour.

Out of 135 former MCI customer-support agents, 108 have chosen to stay, Barker said.

By now, the new call center has 150 employees, Barker said, and training will begin Monday with two additional sessions on July 19 and July 26.

Barker said by the year's end the company plans to hire 500 workers 400 customer support agents and 100 employees in management and technical support.

Founded in 2004, SunRocket began providing national services in January 2005, said Lustig.

The company provides Voice-over-Internet Protocol, or VOIP.

At the start of this year, it had 50,000 customers, Lustig said. Now the company serves 130,000 customers.

The company considers itself the second fastest-growing Internet phone service provider after Vonage in the nation, Lustig said.

The company has two call centers in Philippines and Canada said Lustig, making the Springfield call center its first U.S. customer support center.
