

Welcome mat comes out for online university, jobs

[WAYNE HEILMAN](#)

2010-03-22 10:28:08

Everest University Online will open a service center in northwest Colorado Springs on Monday with 70 employees, a number that officials expect will grow to as many as 600 within 21/2 years, an executive of the school's parent company said Friday.

The center will admit and enroll students, secure student loans and other financial aid and handle career placement and administrative tasks that include grades and other records, said Steve Quattrociochi, president of online learning for Corinthian Colleges, Everest's parent company. The school will move into temporary space in the Corporate Ridge Office and Technology Center while the 70,000 square feet of office space it has leased is renovated, he said.

"This is great news; I'm glad that Everest decided Colorado Springs was the right location for them. These are good-paying jobs for our economy," Mayor Lionel Rivera said Friday.

Everest will receive \$2.5 million in local and state tax breaks to help train its employees, which was "several multiples less" than one of the competing cities, which Quattrociochi declined to identify, offered to attract the center. The school selected Colorado Springs because it wanted a large and well-educated work force, a growing local economy, economic incentives and a location where it could relocate some of its managers and other employees, he said.

"The incentives per job (offered by the Springs) were competitive, but were far and away not the richest but were also not the lowest," Quattrociochi said. "It was the total effort in recruiting us, including a network of business leaders that had a level of pride in the community and were very welcoming. (The company was impressed) that high-level local executives would come to a cocktail party and ask us to come there, offer to help us with job fairs and make sure our calls were answered."

The Colorado Springs Regional Economic Development Corp. began working with Everest in June 2009, met with the school's relocation consultant in Chicago in September, and hosted Corinthian and Everest officials for a visit in November and December, said EDC CEO Mike Kazmierski. The effort included a cocktail party with local business leaders at the El Pomar Center and a last-minute, 40-minute meeting with Gov. Bill Ritter, Kazmierski said.

"The 600 quality jobs that Everest is bringing to this community will really make a difference right now for a lot of families in the Colorado Springs area, including the nearly 27,000 who are unemployed and looking for work," Kazmierski said.

The school also got a "good deal" to be the first tenant in Corporate Ridge, Quattrociochi said. The 1.4 million-square-foot complex at 1575 Garden of the Gods Road was a semiconductor manufacturing complex Intel closed in 2007 and sold last year to investors.

"The first tenant is always the hardest to get," said Michael Palmer of Grubb & Ellis/Quantum Commercial Group, leasing agent for Corporate Ridge. "We are extremely pleased to kick off the occupancy of Corporate Ridge with a quality, long-term tenant such as Everest University Online."

Everest's Colorado Springs operation will be the university's second such center — a similar facility in Tampa, Fla., employs 800. It is Corinthian's third service center; Everest College Phoenix operates a

service center for its online operations in that area.

The Colorado Springs center will be organized with teams of admissions, financial aid and student-service employees who will be assigned to groups of about 200 students to help them stay in school, Quattrociocchi said.

Everest said it had 20,362 exclusively online students as of Dec. 31, up 53.6 percent from a year earlier.

About 10 managers and other employees were transferred here to launch the local center, but the rest of the staff will be hired locally for full-time jobs paying an average of \$40,000 a year that come with benefits that include health insurance, 401(k) retirement accounts, Quattrociocchi said.

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