

## State plan may yield new jobs

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A state effort is under way to lure jobs to the Lynchburg area from high-cost areas of the country, like Northern Virginia.

Central Virginia is one of four areas targeted statewide by the Virginia Economic Development Partnership as destinations for government positions that must be filled within U.S. borders as well as for companies that may be looking to move jobs to lower-cost areas.

The program is expected to take off in the next two months, when the state agency is scheduled to begin marketing the Lynchburg, Harrisonburg, Blacksburg and Danville areas, said Rick Richardson, director of communications and promotion for the Virginia Economic Development Partnership.

Jobs such as accounting, human resources, software development and service center positions could be brought to the Lynchburg area through the effort.

"What we're responding to is an opportunity to capture jobs that are leaving high-cost, urban areas and jobs that can't go offshore," said Richardson.

The initiative dovetails with other efforts already underway in Lynchburg to bring jobs to Lynchburg from Northern Virginia.

Region 2000's Economic Development Council signed onto the Virginia Link Workforce Showcase in January, a program that allowed 10 Lynchburg-area businesses to network with 20 Northern Virginia companies.

Roger Beeker, project manager of Region 2000's Economic Development Council, said a meeting scheduled for today with 20 local businesses would test the interest levels for a second showcase.

"The intent is to bring business from Northern Virginia to Region 2000 instead of taking it to California, Texas, Ohio or wherever they're going," said Beeker.

Carl E. Mitchell, who runs the business-to-business marketing program through his nonprofit Virginia Economic Bridge, said it is too early to tell if the January program was a success. He said it usually takes 18 to 24 months before companies begin to get contracts.

Mitchell said so far three local businesses have returned to Northern Virginia to give presentations, one Northern Virginia company has plans to visit a Central Virginia company and one local business bid on a contract but did not receive it.

The new Virginia Economic Development Partnership program will put the state in the center of the marketing pitch instead of local businesses.

Richardson said the state agency plans to look for business opportunities as far away as Boston, New York and Chicago.

He would not estimate how much money the state is willing to pump into the program for travel, marketing and personnel since the state agency is still working on their budget.

"We will be putting appropriate resources against it," he said. "We're out to make this a successful initiative."

Since being selected as a prototype community, Region 2000 has been compiling a community profile, said Lee Cobb, executive director of Region 2000's Economic Development Council.

Cobb said the profile includes information such as local colleges and majors the schools offer, access to broadband Internet and reliable power sources, cost of living and quality of schools.

In the next two weeks, Cobb said a consultant hired by the state will visit Lynchburg to help revise the profile.

Cobb said he is optimistic, but he warned that project is still being developed.

"I don't want to get people excited to the point where people are going to think something's going to happen overnight," Cobb said.

Richardson said the state agency is still working on product development and testing the program on companies friendly to the idea. He said the big push is still about 60 days away.

Del. Shannon Valentine, D-Lynchburg, discussed the program at a breakfast hosted by the Lynchburg Regional Chamber of Commerce and Central Virginia Industries Tuesday morning. She said the economic development partnership with the state is exciting for the local business community.

"This is a great opportunity for us," she said.

"We are rich in possibilities."