

THE STATE OF MORRISVILLE: CORPORATIONS EMBRACE TOWN'S LOCATION AT CENTER OF TRIANGLE

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Longtime Triangle residents may remember when Morrisville was just an outlet mall and little else. Or as the place where you wound up if you took a wrong turn on your way to Raleigh-Durham International Airport.

Not anymore. The formerly sleepy burg has become a key destination for some of the area's biggest employers, including Lenovo, Time Warner Cable and a host of smaller companies. Morrisville's location in the heart of the Triangle and its proximity to RDU and highways such as Interstate 540 are major selling points for marquee names such as Duke University Health System, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina and Wake Technical Community College.

Sharon Rosche, president of the Morrisville Chamber of Commerce, says commercial growth has been steady over the past five years. "We used to be a mostly residential town in the past, but now we're close to 50-50 between residential and business," she says. Chamber membership has also risen, from 150 members to approximately 500 in the past eight years.

Lenovo's location of its North American headquarters in Morrisville was perhaps the town's biggest coup. In 2005, the Chinese computer maker committed to build an \$84 million, three-building campus and to add 400 jobs by 2010 – a move that will raise its area work force to 2,220.

Lenovo was convinced not to relocate in part by state incentives totaling \$9.125 million. Morrisville and Wake County also promised \$1.05 million each. Rosche says the funds have yet to be paid out as the company has not met its jobs creation goals. In fact, Lenovo has announced several rounds of personnel cuts, which reduced employees from the 1,800 workers that were already in the Triangle when Lenovo acquired IBM's PC division.

DRUG INDUSTRY PRESENCE

Rosche said the chamber is in talks to lure two companies to Morrisville, but she declined to identify them. While Morrisville lost to Cary in a bid to attract IT outsourcing company HCL America, Rosche sees the deal as a victory for the Triangle. "We see a win for any town in the area in getting a company as a win for everyone," she says, adding that HCL America simply found a better real estate deal in Cary.

Morrisville's strongest contingent of new arrivals is clearly in the biotech and pharmaceuticals fields, with such companies as Diosynth, PPD, Laboratory Corp. of America and Salix Pharmaceuticals all hosting Morrisville facilities.

For Array Biopharma of Colorado, which opened a clinical development office on Carrington Mill Road in Morrisville in June, the location allows access to skilled biotech workers and proximity to other biotech companies.

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"We wanted an East Coast location, and Morrisville was a great resource for the people we need," says spokeswoman Tricia Haugeto. The office conducts clinical trials of drugs designed to fight cancer and inflammatory diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Setting up shop in Morrisville offered another key advantage – time. Haugeto says opening an office in the eastern time zone made it easier for the 300-employee company to communicate with business partners and customers in Europe.

The office, which currently employs a half-dozen workers, is expected to expand to about 15 people by next summer, Haugeto says.

BIGGER FACILITIES

Morrisville is also where some existing employers are choosing to expand. Time Warner Cable, which currently is spread out over three offices in Perimeter Park and on Innovation Boulevard, is consolidating operations in a new four-story building at 4200 Paramount Parkway in Perimeter Park, just across from the Lenovo headquarters. The 160,000-square-foot building, a facility being built by the Staubach Companies, Duke Realty, Giffels Associates and Cline Design, broke ground in June. The first wall went up Sept. 12, and the building is expected to be ready in late spring 2009. The building will be LEED-certified, an affirmation of the facility's environment-friendly design aspects. Company spokeswoman Melissa Buscher says Time Warner has not yet determined exactly what operations will be housed in the new facility,

but the building will include the company's call center. She says that Morrisville's central location is especially important for a cable and Internet service provider, given that Time Warner serves customers across the Triangle.