

State bridge program creates demand

The construction projects have brought companies to Salem

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Bridges are designed to allow traffic to easily come and go, but the Oregon Transportation Investment Act 111 is bringing more and more business into Salem and it seems to be here to stay.

The \$1.3 billion Bridge Delivery Program, which was created by the 2003 Legislature, not only repairs or replaces hundreds of aging bridges across the state, but it also is spurring economic development for businesses and workers.

"The bridge program has created a demand for innovative and cost-effective design services here in Oregon," said Karen Jones, the program's communications manager. "Because of the bridge program, Salem has become a hub of cutting-edge bridge engineering companies. The creative designs coming out of Salem-area engineering companies are then built in most cases by Oregon's well-established heavy construction industry."

Growth is defined as the number of Oregon companies opening permanent offices in the Salem area, or by the number of new design and engineering firms bringing their offices to Oregon.

Quincy Engineering sent two full-time employees from California in 2004.

"We planned the move to Oregon as a one way trip," said Karen Tatman, an associate principal engineer at Quincy Engineering Inc. Quincy has hired five people to fulfill its \$700,000 in bridge program contracts. "Being in the same city and near construction is a big advantage. It makes it easier for us to coordinate our work than if we were located in Portland," she said.

Diversification was the key in Quincy's move to Oregon. "Our business isn't just about bridges. We are a civil engineering firm, so we do work for cities, counties and private business," Tatman said.

The bridge work was the economic springboard that brought many of the engineering companies to the city.

"Now that we are here, it is a much bigger market than just bridges," Tatman said. "We are sub-



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Bridge and highway construction projects in Oregon have drawn companies to Salem.

mitting proposals and selling ourselves as the best engineering firm for the job."

Doing business in Oregon is different than California. Tatman said when you are the newcomer, you have to learn how to do projects the Oregon way.

"Now we are established and getting phone calls all the time, but we had to work for it," she said.

CH2M Hill hardly is a newcomer to Oregon. Founded in 1946 by three Oregon State University students, the company employees more than 18,000 people worldwide. Salem has a piece of the worldwide talent since the satellite office opened in June 2003. The office started with two employees and has an average of about 10 full-time employees.

Forrest Fischer, project manager at Salem CH2M Hill, said the satellite office was slated to be working on the bridges through 2009.

"We would really like to see our work with the Oregon Department of Transportation go beyond that. We are actively pursuing that," Fischer said. "In that case, we would definitely stay in Salem."

HW Lochner opened its Salem office in July 2003. Lochner originated from Chicago and has plans to stay in Salem.

"The bridge program has been good, however it is not the only work we have gotten," said Karen Reynolds, the vice president and office manager of Lochner. "It takes a long-term strategy. You have to plan for the long haul."

Reynolds said Lochner came to Salem and wanted to make a commitment to the community.

"We live, play and work here," Reynolds said. "I do not think we could do as good of a job if we would have put the office in Portland. We design for context and we want to be a part of that context."

Lochner has 27 offices. Moving in and joining the bandwagon and then leaving when the work is finished is not part of the plan.

"That is why we hire locally," Reynolds said. They have 22 area employees and Salem is their largest office within the company.

To make the Salem office a smart move, Lochner banked on diversification. "The bridge work has been

good, but it is not the only work we have gotten. Outside diversification was a goal for us," Reynolds said. "We are here to do other things as well."

That plan is working. Lochner has worked with other local agencies and is planning on different jobs to equal about \$7 million.

Many of the engineering companies have worked with Oregon State University's Civil Engineering Cooperative Program that takes engineering students and gives them a chance to gain on-the-job skills. "We just brought on a student through the program and two of our seven employees are Oregon State graduates," Reynolds said.

According to the Bridge Delivery Program, about 17 family wage jobs are sustained for every \$1 million spent on transportation construction in Oregon. Each year during the OTIA program, construction projects will sustain about 5,000 family wage jobs.