



## **Economist: Call center jobs fit needs of Madison County population**

### **Shadyside Park improvements fulfilled**

**By Melanie D. Hayes**

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ANDERSON, Ind. — More call center jobs are coming to Anderson, and economic experts say it is an industry that will benefit Madison County residents.

TeleServices Direct, a global provider of outsourced inbound and outbound call center services, announced on Wednesday that it will bring 180 jobs over three years at its new location in the Flagship Enterprise Center's business park.

Anderson is in a need of a mix of different types of jobs that cover different levels of expertise, skills, education and salary requirements, and having the new company come to Anderson fulfills part of that need, said Greg Winkler, the city's interim economic development director.

"There is a chunk of the labor market that needs and benefits from these types of jobs that pay \$10 an hour to \$15 an hour," Winkler said.

An increase in higher-paying jobs is always desired everywhere and can greatly boost an economy, but they are not always easy to come by, said Michael Hicks, a Ball State University economist.

Hicks said Anderson is a bifurcated community with great manufacturing jobs and great jobs for university graduates.

"The problem is there has been an erosion of the middle- and entry-level jobs," he said. "The middle-class jobs are going to be hard to come by in one big swoop. Nestlé provides you with some of that, but that still leaves you with an excess supply of, quite frankly, minimally skilled workers."

The call center helps fill that void and offers jobs to those workers, he said.

This is at least the second call center in Anderson. TeleServices Direct will be moving into the same business park as the other center, Affiliated Computer Services.

And that labor force — among a good location, amenities and existing and necessary infrastructure — is a major reason why call centers are drawn to Anderson, Winkler said.

"One of the reasons they come to Anderson is because they see people who need jobs. I can promise you that they look very hard at the labor market. They are very careful about where they locate. They want to be sure they can get high-quality people at a competitive price."

Winkler said the city needs these types of jobs, and it also needs higher-paying jobs, so that people have options.

"But right now there is not a large number of workers in Anderson who are ready to be hired for \$16 to \$25 an hour," Hicks said.

That is something that a lot of communities with declining populations face. And often people who do have the skills, experience and education levels for those higher-paying jobs already are employed, he said. Those who can work at lower-paying jobs face higher unemployment and are ready to fill open positions.

"The type of jobs that you are going to get in a community largely tells you something about yourself and whether you are attractive to different types of companies or not," Hicks said.

And those new jobs will have other impacts as well.

"It will also put upward pressure on wages at other jobs that might have kept lower salaries as a consequence for insufficient skill sets," Hicks said.

When people leave other low-paying jobs for the call center, those businesses may have to raise their wages to try to draw new or return employees.

Besides benefiting people seeking jobs at the call center, the new jobs will give the economy a small boost in another way.

Based on a calculation of 180 jobs times 1.3, a method used by economists when studying counties like Madison County, a total of about 225 jobs will be generated from this. People who get hired at the call center will have money to spend on goods and services, and then that will increase the need for more employees at restaurants, gas stations and other businesses, Hicks said.

A call center is also a great place for people to start out and gain experiences, skills and training that can help them move on to higher-paying jobs, Hicks said. High school graduates who chose not to or couldn't pursue post-secondary education can use the jobs as a gateway.

Chuck Staley, CEO of the Flagship Enterprise Center, said that having Anderson University, Purdue University and Ivy Tech in the same area as the call centers offers employees educational opportunities. While working at call centers, people can get additional technical training to help them at those jobs and in the future. Companies have found that having those colleges there is beneficial because their employees can grow, he said.

"We all start someplace, don't we?" Staley said. "It's nice to start off as electrical engineers, but it's important to provide employment and growth opportunities to the entire population."

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