

## Southern Idaho Has Trained Workforce For Plug-and-Play Call Center

By Lisa Buddecke & Jan Rogers, Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization

**A** large business support call center in the southern Idaho city of Twin Falls, formerly occupied by Dell Computers Inc., is ready for a new occupant with several hundred employees trained and ready to work.

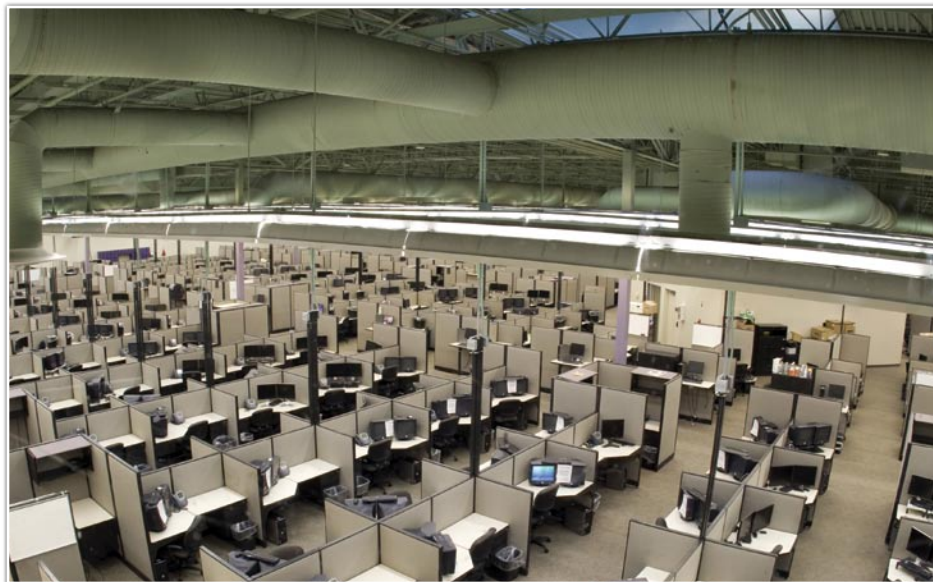
It's not often a business can find a fully outfitted, 48,000 square foot facility ready to move into and hundreds of well-trained workers available to support operations. Over the years, hundreds have been trained in various levels of customer service, computer systems and technical support at the local College of Southern Idaho (CSI). Thanks to business-tailored courses, one specifically designed to Dell's high standards, a large qualified workforce is in place to support a related new business.

"This large facility housed a technical support center yet is certainly a prime location for a business looking for a ready-to-go building, equipment and employees," said Melinda Anderson, executive director of Twin Falls Urban Renewal Agency. There are 680 work stations, over 800 pc's and laptops, 614 parking spaces, large capacity phone system and data center critical systems in place.

"Other businesses around the country, particularly those in the technology sector, are already seriously considering this location as a potential match for their business expansion," explained Anderson. "As word of this facility's availability continues to travel through the economic development/site selection chain, we anticipate securing a new tenant in the next several months."

### Landing a National Giant

This uniquely small market that sits right on the Snake River Canyon, 70 miles south of Sun Valley and 120 miles south east of Boise, won this Dell call center in 2001 thanks to many factors: no related technical center competitor in the area; appropriate age distribution of the community's residents; a mountain time zone location; moderate climate; pro-business environment; quality of life; affordable housing; good school system – and most importantly for any call center, availability of college graduates and ongoing technical education opportunities.



Each of these positive factors still exist which will likely be appealing to another call center or related industry looking to expand in the western United States.

### Refocusing Amidst Change

Economic and business consolidation concerns by Dell lead to an announcement last summer that they would shut down their call center operations in Twin Falls after a successful eight-and-a-half year run.

An announcement of a facility closing by any employer – particularly one like Dell Computers – is a blow to any community. But almost immediately following this news, local and regional economic development representatives as well as Twin Falls city leaders, the College of Southern Idaho, and state government quickly stepped up to find new placement for several hundred employees and market the fully outfitted facility.

"We had to quickly refocus on getting as many folks as possible rehired in other industries while marketing the facility to related companies," Anderson said. "It just didn't make sense to focus on the loss. It was time to shift gears, immediately, to identify the positives and put them into practice."

Anderson and numerous other community entities gathered, including the primary partner in Dell training, The College of Southern Idaho, to address next steps in the post-closure announcement process.

### Education in Partnership with Business

Twin Falls is fortunate. Small markets often don't have the caliber of a community college like the College of Southern Idaho in their neighborhood. That became even more evident when Dell chose this community, confirming that CSI was one of the more important factors that helped tip the scales in finally selecting Twin Falls.

CSI is a vital partner in economic development for the whole southern Idaho region. This two-year community college has – since its inception – been proactive and supportive in all efforts related to economic development in the area.

In fact, CSI president, Dr Jerry Beck, received the International Economic Development Council's most prestigious award in 2003 (while CSI vice president) that honors an economic development practitioner who has demonstrated excellence in continuing education.

His distinguished, internationally-recognized pro-business leadership in such a rural community is unprecedented. Any new business looking for a prime location that offers a myriad of advantages that will enhance business success should put southern Idaho on their radar.

Of course, having an existing building, ample parking space and available work force helped Dell to consider Twin Falls early on from 3,330 other communities. But

immediate job training for applicants and an opportunity for applicants to pursue and be trained in advanced areas of technical support on an on-going basis was critical.

**Tailoring Courses for a Specific Business**

Call center technology requires staff trained at various levels to accommodate a multi-tiered system, from the first responder to technically-savvy staff capable of handling a myriad of issues. Twin Falls and CSI understood that staffing a call center requires technically trained employees at the onset as well as those trained over time to fill the pipeline as the business grows and staffing demands need to be quickly met.

Getting courses organized and training done quickly was not too big of a task for this rural community. CSI has a long-established and proven history in establishing dozens of comprehensive, highly-specialized business-related training programs for a wide range of industries. Many courses have been developed or enhanced as a result of the college's close business industry relationship.

"Whatever a business needs in regards to employee training, regardless of their niche, CSI works closely with that business to develop a tailored program that will enhance the capabilities of those employees," said Jan Rogers, executive director of Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization. "Their motto for the business sector seems to be 'accommodate and stay flexible'. New and existing businesses alike enjoy the specialized training, support and education that only CSI provides" Rogers said.

The technical/computer training opportunities provided through CSI reach well beyond what Dell originally required. "A basic introductory course on computer operation systems was the first class built with an eye toward getting hundreds of potential Dell employees trained quickly," said Lori Garnand, CSI Information Technology department chair and associate professor. "A comprehensive computer support program, industry certified, is still in place to assure students are able to meet the technically-related needs of employers in any industry," she said.

Southern Idaho residents and businesses know and appreciate the many advantages living and working here offers. With so much to offer – including a "plug-and-play" call center facility – related businesses may consider this rural community as the most ideal location to step right in and start their operations. 🏡



# When It Comes To Your Business

## Our Peaks and Valleys Are Exceptional

In life or business, very few can say their valleys are as rewarding as their peaks. But there's a magic here that evens out everything, life is better and business is better. It's the perfect balance; one look, two valleys, the best of both worlds.



Another plus is the College of Southern Idaho, not to mention some of the lowest energy costs in the nation. The Magic Valley is home to companies like Dell Corporation's Technical Support Center and Jayco, Inc.

The Wood River Valley is just a short drive from the Magic Valley and is the destination of choice for visitors from all over the world. Home to Sun Valley and some of Hollywood's biggest stars, the Wood River Valley offers what some call the best fly fishing in the United States, not to mention some of the finest skiing anywhere on this earth. This valley offers a lifestyle and recreational opportunities worth working for.

Whether you're looking for large scale or upscale manufacturing or an unparalleled lifestyle, the good news is within a little over an hour you can experience both of our valleys.

With one of the deepest canyons in the Northwest and the mighty Snake river running through it, the Magic Valley offers excitement and plenty of open spaces for a company scoping out a large-area manufacturing facility with easy distribution access. If you're focus is on a major retail center with a strong, versatile workforce and affordable housing, this is it.

To be in your long-term vision, we know we must meet a very specific list of criteria before business relocation. We also know, all things being equal, one look at the Valleys of Southern Idaho and you'll feel a renewal and excitement about your business you haven't felt for years. The Wood River and Magic Valley, the best of both worlds.

This may be the only place where higher peaks and lower valleys make for the best business in the world.

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