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Contact Us:

Physical Address: Grant County EDC, 6594 Patton Blvd NE, Moses Lake, WA 98837

Billing Address: PO Box 2359, Moses Lake WA 98837

Phone: 509-764-6579 **Fax:** 509-762-5161

Email: jonathan@grantedc.com emily@grantedc.com allan.peterson@wsbdc.org



Local Data Center Industry Creeping up on 1,000 Jobs

From 21 employees in 2010 to 605 employees in 2013, data centers in Central Washington are adding jobs at a rapid pace.

"I'm not aware of any local industry that is adding jobs quicker than data centers," said Jonathan Smith, Executive Director of the Grant County EDC. "Jobs have gone up over two-thousand seven hundred percent in the past four years for which we have numbers."

The numbers Smith is referring to come from the Washington State Department of Revenue which is tasked with collecting job information from companies that receive tax incentives.

Information collected includes the number of jobs, the salaries, and whether the jobs offer health and retirement benefits.



"Ninety-eight percent of the new jobs pay over \$20.00 an hour and eighty percent of the new jobs pay over \$30.00 an hour," explained Smith. "This translates to an overall average data center wage of over \$68,000 a year which is roughly double the countywide average wage of \$35,000 a year."

The Department of Revenue data also shows that 98.8% of all positions are full time, 99.3% offer medical benefits, and 96.4% offer retirement benefits.

These jobs are being snatched up by local residents, says Smith. Every time he visits one of the data centers he meets another employee who was born and raised locally and now has the job of their dreams.

The pathway leading to such jobs is becoming easier to travel as the companies invest tens of thousands of dollars into the local education system. In addition to internships at the college and community college level, there are also paid internships for students that are still in high school.

"Someone born 18 years ago in George or Coulee City or Wilson Creek now has the opportunity to do a local internship with some of the largest internet and technology companies in the world," says Smith. "Nowhere else in rural America are these kinds of opportunities available."

And the opportunities are only going to get better and better. With significant expansions at Server Farm Realty's Titan data center, Sabey's Integrate Quincy data center, and Microsoft's new 200 acre data center campus, hundreds more jobs are still to come.

It's not unforeseeable that in the next few years the number of people employed full time at data centers in Central Washington could exceed 1,000. The job numbers reported by the Department of Revenue only capture the jobs at data centers that receive the state's tax incentive. Smith estimates there were at least 100 other jobs in 2013 at data centers that did not receive tax incentives.

"The actual 2013 job count was easily over 700," said Smith. "The way the industry is continuing to grow we could easily be over 1,000 by 2016 or 2017."



What Brings Retail to Grant County?



Marshall's



Recently Grant County has seen a lot of new growth in the retail sector. Just in 2015 Panda Express, Party City, Marshalls and a second Grant County location of Pita Pit have announced they are opening locations in Moses Lake. Prior to 2013 it was not common to hear an announcement about a new store locating here. Why is that? What drives the decision makers and their choices? What can we do to help?

Retail stores all have their own guide maps for determining which communities can work. There are many factors and each store can be drastically different. Even Home Depot and Lowe's have different criteria they look for even though they are both home supply stores.

One of the common factors retailers look for in communities is the population, the more people in a smaller radius the better. For example, Olive Garden wants a population of 100,000 people within a 15-minute drive time.

Average income is another factor. Companies like Target want communities with an average household income of \$63,000 per year. Currently Grant County's average household income is \$56,655.

A third factor that isn't so obvious is how specific retailers are about the building or site they will develop. For example, a site that is 10 feet longer than it is wide, or doesn't have the right easement behind it, can be the difference between a green light or the company opening a location somewhere else. Some retailers are even so specific, they want to pick who their neighbors are and they will only locate next to certain stores.

On top of all these site selection factors, companies can only open so many stores in a given year. As a hypothetical example, Kohl's will open 30 stores this year all across the United States. This means if Moses Lake is in the competition for one of these stores we could be competing with metropolitan areas like Boston, Phoenix, Miami or Denver.

Even though Grant County may be able to support Kohl's, if the company determines it will make more money by opening in Denver, then it will open a store there. We may meet all the other factors but still be passed over simply because another location is more profitable.

Retailers have teams of people dedicated to finding and opening new locations. They come into the community to count rooftops, explore the current retail environment, and browse through the local social media to get a feel of what a community is really like.

We have heard from many of these teams that Grant County is close to reaching a tipping point. As new stores open we will attract more shoppers to our community to shop in these stores. This will continue to grow local retail sales which will encourage more companies to locate here which then attracts more shoppers to our community and the cycle repeats.

Although a new company announcing its decision to locate here might not excite everyone, it may be the store other people are wanting. The thing to remember is every additional retail store gets us a step closer to bringing other retailers or restaurants that are on the community's wish list.



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Port of Moses Lake
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Moses Lake School District
National Frozen Foods
Northland Communications
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Polhamus Heating & Air Conditioning
Port of Coulee City
Port of Hartline
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