



Sept. 19, 2007, 6:25PM

AT&T brings outsourced jobs back to U.S. to Ark. call center

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press Writer
© 2007 The Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK — San Antonio-based AT&T Inc. announced plans Wednesday to bring 175 call center jobs once outsourced overseas back to the United States, part of a group of 5,000 outsourced jobs company officials plan to fold back into its operations.

The new call center, to be located at AT&T Arkansas' headquarters in Little Rock, will help callers who have AT&T Yahoo! High Speed Internet services. The new union-represented jobs will bring AT&T Arkansas up to 2,800 employees with a \$135 million payroll, said president Ed Drilling.

"These jobs are currently outsourced to other companies and a lot of the work is actually done overseas," Drilling told a news conference at the Little Rock Regional Chamber of Commerce. "We're bringing these jobs as part of an ongoing commitment back into the country."

Drilling said he did not know what countries currently fielded the calls.

Gov. Mike Beebe attended the announcement, saying he had been "strictly warned" not to mention the other states that vied for the call center jobs. However, Beebe said that "two of them were real big states" and that competition had been tough.

"Apparently, there was dissatisfaction by the customers with the services that were being rendered because of the outsourcing overseas," Beebe later told reporters.

Ted Wagon, an AT&T Arkansas spokesman, disagreed, saying the "other companies gave very good customer service." Late Wednesday, Beebe spokesman Matt

DeCamplesaid the governor misspoke and meant to say that union workers were dissatisfied with the outsourcing.

Walt Sharp, an AT&T spokesman based out of the company's San Antonio headquarters, said the return of the Little Rock jobs from contractors was part of a push to bring 5,000 contracted jobs back into the company under union representation. He said the vast majority of those jobs covered technical support from the company's DSL services.

"We prefer to do our jobs in-house," Sharp said. "These jobs have been done as outsourced since the inception of the product they serviced" in the 1990s.

Wednesday's announcement comes on the heels of several other major economic announcements in Little Rock. Dassault Falcon Aircraft says it will make a \$10 million investment and 100 jobs over the next three years, on top of another \$20 million expansion announced in June. A Denmark company announced it would build a new \$150 million windmill blade factory and headquarters in Little Rock, employing more than 1,000 people. An Indian company also will build a \$100 million pipe plant in the city.

AT&T stock closed up 75 cents in Wednesday trading to \$41.58.

On the Net:

AT&T Inc.: <http://www.att.com>