

Study: Springs labor is plentiful

[WAYNE HEILMAN](#)

November 6, 2008 - 9:37PM

Nearly 66,000 people living within a 50-mile radius of Colorado Springs are underemployed and would take a better job if one were available, according to a new study conducted by a Dallas-based labor market research firm.

When combined with more than 35,000 unemployed residents and another 5,000 people who would come out of retirement or return to work for the right job, the study found a potential labor pool of 106,600 for employers looking to add staff. The study was completed last month by The Pathfinders, a Dallas economic development and corporate site selection consulting firm, by interviewing 700 households and 18 businesses.

The Colorado Springs Regional Economic Development Corp. commissioned the study to combat growing concerns about labor availability. Corporate site selection consultants and companies considering opening call centers and customer service operations have expressed concerns that the Springs area is saturated with such operations. The Pikes Peak Workforce Center and Colorado Technical University co-sponsored the \$24,000 study.

"While Colorado Springs has a great pool of labor for (the call center) industry, some employers may feel that the market may be too saturated to position themselves as the preferred employer in the market," said Brian Allen, a research analyst in labor analytics for the Phoenix office of CB Richard Ellis Inc. "Our clients are generally looking for areas with a low saturation of other call centers in their same industry."

Labor availability is the biggest issue for any economic development project, and "if it is perceived that a region does not meet a company's work force requirements, then they will not even consider the region," said David White, EDC's executive vice president of marketing. The report already has helped the nonprofit recruiting group convince two companies that the Springs can meet their work force needs, he said. He declined to name the prospects.

The study shows the Springs has plenty of available labor for incoming employers because they typically hire workers who are underemployed and seeking a better job that would pay about \$2 an hour more than their current jobs, Dianne White, vice president of The Pathfinders, said during a press conference Thursday at the Cheyenne Mountain Resort about the report's findings.

The 66,000 underemployed residents make up 10.6 percent of the population and include workers whose skills and experience are not fully used in their current jobs, are making less than others with similar experience and education or are working less than full time.

The area's supply of underemployed people is similar to other areas of the nation, said David Brandon, senior vice president of Dallas-based Site Selection Group.

The area's pool of underemployed workers are "reasonably well-educated with solid experience for many of the industries" that EDC is trying to recruit to the Springs, Brandon said. That pool includes 18,500 former information technology workers, most of whom have

engineering and system analysis experience, as well as former workers in the manufacturing sector, the study found.

"These workers stayed here and were willing to work for lower wages because of the lifestyle of this region," Brandon said. "Colorado Springs has a reasonable likelihood of attracting employers for those workers because there are many projects out there in the marketplace, especially for companies from California, that find the lifestyle here matches their expectations."

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Contact the writer: 636-0234 or wayneh@gazette.com