



Steve Howe, executive director of the Vermillion Chamber of Commerce and Development Company, addresses a crowd made up of local media and well-wishers at the site of the new Vermillion Technology Center that will house Eagle Creek Software Services. A ground-breaking ceremony to formally welcome the new business to the city concluded Tuesday morning's activities. Seated behind Howe are Ken Behrendt, president of Eagle Creek, University of South Dakota President James Abbott, and Mel Ustad of the Governor's Office of Economic Development. Also seated behind Howe, but not pictured, is Mayor Jack Powell.

(Photo by David Lias)

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As he spoke, a construction worker in a hardhat began driving a large truck across the construction area. The rumble of the engine served as an unmistakable signal that the Eagle Creek project, after months of planning, is now progressing quickly in Vermillion.

If Ken Behrendt, president of Eagle Creek, shared Howe's nervousness, he didn't show it. He clearly was excited as he talked to media at the work site Tuesday.

"It's a great day, because this is our third project center; it's a reaffirmation of what we've been doing for the last nine years. This will be our biggest project center out here - 32,000 square feet," he said. "Another significant thing is it represents a strategic alignment with the University of South Dakota ... and we know we need that to progress this."

The partnership with the University of South Dakota creates "a supply chain" that will ease the transition of USD students into the workforce at Eagle Creek's Vermillion location.

"We now have a way to get students into our workforce that's an easier way," Behrendt said. "When they come in as freshmen or sophomores, we can start acclimating them to different programs, and that cuts our training class down."

He said that training is crucial as technologies being used in workplaces throughout the United States and globally are growing more complex.

"We need advanced training, and we're able to give that training faster and sooner through programs like internships and courses that are going to be taught or are currently being taught at the university," Behrendt said. "That creates a knowledge base, and accelerates the whole program for us."

A key component is the Information Technology Consultant Academy, located on the USD campus. The new academy gives USD students the opportunity to begin their careers in Information Technology in Vermillion, with an internship and first job at the information center currently being constructed in Vermillion to house Eagle Creek.

Those skilled employees will significantly reduce the training time and costs usually associated with securing new employees for the firm, Behrendt said. Those who complete the academy's coursework will be workforce ready wherever they seek employment.

The Information Technology Consultant Academy integrates four undergraduate courses with an internship, which will provide participants a unique credential entering an IT-related profession.

Enrollees in the academy will take four

undergraduate courses - two in computer sciences and two in business - to earn an undergrad certificate and gain 12 credit hours.

Participants must also complete a paid internship, and then interview for employment which may lead to employment with Eagle Creek.

Those who seek employment at Eagle Creek may have the opportunity to pursue a sponsored graduate degree, including a master of business administration or master of science in administration, both customized for Eagle Creek.

A third option will be a master of science in computer science.

Behrendt describes Eagle Creek as a "Generation Y" company in terms of its workforce.

"That means we're looking for recent college graduates," he said. "Our typical age (of workers) at the project center is going to be somewhere between 21 and 28 years old. Those are new graduates, and generally speaking, new graduates with a couple years of experience."

"That's the workforce we're targeting, and of that, we expect 10 to 15 percent to come from South Dakota," Behrendt said. "We would love to have it all from South Dakota, but we are competing with all of the other companies trying to attract that workforce, so we know we're going to have to import 85 to 90 percent of our talent from out-of-state - places like Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, Nebraska and Texas."

Eagle Creek's services are used by a variety of companies around the globe, from healthcare, insurance and financial services, to communications, technology, and life sciences.

"We service mainstream technology. That means that whatever Fortune 2000 (companies) have adopted as a technology, that's what we will be implementing. Those are all commercially

available applications or technology," Behrendt said. "Our target market is a Fortune 2000, generally they're over a billion dollars in revenue, and generally they're global or they're regional companies. Today, we service Europe, Africa, South America, Central America, Australia and southeast Asia."

Eagle Creek is not a call center with technicians on phones trouble-shooting computer problems. Its mission is much more advanced.

"We're implementing technology. Today, for example, a very hot item is a mobile application. We all have smart phones, and more and more businesses are moving their technology down to the tablets or to the smart phones," Behrendt said.

"That's one of the primary things we're going to be doing here in Vermillion. As our Fortune 2000 customers move that information, and access that data down to the lowest level," he said, "we will be building those applications for them and integrating them back into their main systems."

Behrendt's confidence in attracting highly talented and educated employees comes not only from the unique efforts of Eagle Creek, USD and the VCDC, but also from the Vermillion community itself.

"We're finding that there is uniqueness about Vermillion," he said. "We're relocating an ex-Vermillion person from San Diego back here, we're finding local people who we haven't found before, and we're finding ex-South Dakotans who are willing

to come back, and we're relocating them back to South Dakota. We're finding that it is much easier to recruit them to Vermillion, so we're thinking that in our first two months, this is going to be very good for us from a recruiting standpoint."

Howe has added a new task to his daily "to do" list now that construction has begun. Every day, he takes a drive past the building site to view the progress workers are making.

"Coming to the site every day, and just seeing that little bit of progress," he said. "That's what it's all about - and this weekend, watching the area be transformed from simply a flat piece of ground to a dug-out space - it's really exciting. You get little goose bumps when you come by and know what's going to happen."

Howe, a Vermillion native, has been executive director of the VCDC for approximately five years. The Eagle Creek project, he said, serves as a milestone for not only him personally, but also the entire Vermillion community.

"You always dream, you always strive to get to this point," he said. "I've always had faith that Vermillion could accommodate a business like this. And the partnership with the university - right now, it seems obvious when you think of it, but you really have to put a lot of work and effort into building those partnerships, and bringing that all together."

"I always did envision that this type of thing could happen here," Howe said, "and I think this is just the beginning of what's to come."



KEN BEHRENDT

POSITION AVAILABLE:

The Rural Office of Community Services, Inc. is seeking someone for the position of janitor/kitchen assistant for the Vermillion Dakota Senior Meals Program. The site serves a noon meal five days a week, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. This position is for 4 hours a day, 9:30AM to 2:00PM, including a 1/2 lunch break. Duties will include washing dishes, meeting sanitation requirements, general cleaning of nutrition site and assisting with the preparation of the noon meal for congregating and home delivered participants. The applicant must be prompt and dependable and able to work well with the elderly. Benefits include paid holidays and PTO. The applicant must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance. Anyone who is interested, please contact the Rural Office of Community Services, P O Box 70, 140 Highway 50, Lake Andes, South Dakota, 57356 or call 605-487-7634

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