

Case Study: Choose DuPage Stresses Partnerships in Business Retention



Choose DuPage is the first point of contact for businesses looking for expansion resources in DuPage County. Due to Choose DuPage's relationships with service providers in areas including workforce development, business counseling and financing Choose DuPage has the ability to deliver resources that are not exclusively their own. This informal network is unique in economic development circles because it is client driven, results oriented and efficient.

In early 2009 MicroSun Technologies LLC, located in Lisle, DuPage County, Illinois finalized its long term expansion plans and reached out to Choose DuPage to determine what local, county and state resources were available to assist them moving forward. With a facility in Nevada, MicroSun was being courted to consolidate its operations and relocate to Nevada. Choose DuPage quickly assembled its economic development team and made a site visit to the company. Attendees included two representatives from Choose DuPage, a representative from the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and a representative from workNet DuPage.

MicroSun Technologies LLC is the leading global source for customized portable energy needs solutions including rechargeable batteries and charging systems. MicroSun applies cutting-edge technology and innovative engineering to the design, assembly and testing of battery packs systems and chargers. MicroSun's patented thermal management system licensed from the Illinois Institute of Technology makes lithium-ion batteries a viable option for high-power and high-temperature applications. This type of innovative technology allows MicroSun to be valued partner for new product development both in the commercial and military sectors. By example, the Air Force was struggling with heat in a particular communications application. They reached out to MicroSun because of MicroSun's patented technology but also because MicroSun had a proven track record in commercial battery packaging. The Air Force was primarily interested in having a domestic manufacturing source for proprietary lithium ion batteries. To meet this challenge and its growing commercial customer base, MicroSun needed to expand its facility and add staff.

MicroSun considered many options which included combining the Lisle, Illinois facility with their sister company in Las Vegas, Nevada, consolidating the Lisle, Illinois facility with another facility in northwest Indiana or expanding in Lisle. They ultimately chose to expand in Lisle, Illinois due in part to the proximity of Argonne National Laboratory, which is an international leader in battery research and the State of Illinois' commitment to fund their expansion with the EDGE program. DuPage County committed \$25,000 of incumbent worker training dollars to the deal as well. MicroSun's commitment to expand the Lisle, Illinois facility resulted in the

retention of eighty five jobs and the creation of a minimum of five high paying engineering jobs. According to Catherine Schuster, the Economic Development Coordinator for the Village of Lisle, "Ensuring that local businesses thrive and maintain/create high quality jobs is critical to the economic vitality of a region. The Village of Lisle values the resources and support provided by DECO, Choose DuPage and workNet DuPage. This partnership enables the Village to remain competitive in today's challenging economic environment."

With operations in the United States and overseas, MicroSun supports high-volume and low-volume manufacturing for a diverse customer base. The company currently employs 98 people in Lisle and more than 200 people worldwide. According to Tom Golab, Vice President of Business Development, "Choose DuPage made a very difficult decision easy. They put us in touch with the right people at the State of Illinois and at DuPage County who in turn explained all the business development programs and tools available to us."

DCEO is the state's lead economic development agency offering a variety of programs that are geared towards business retention, expansion and job creation. The main program they offer is the EDGE tax credit which provides a corporate tax credit based on a company's aggregate payroll taxes. To qualify a company must provide documentation that they have an option to leave the state, that they will be making an investment of at least \$5 million in capital improvements and that they will be creating a minimum of twenty five new full time jobs in Illinois. For a company with 100 or fewer employees, the company must agree to make a capital investment of \$1million and create at least five new full time jobs in Illinois. According to Michelle Michals of the Illinois Department of Commerce, "Choose DuPage is a true partner in assisting the State of Illinois in achieving its economic development goals. I rely on Choose DuPage to uncover business relocation and expansion opportunities that the State just cannot discover at the local level."

workNet DuPage is a department of DuPage County that is funded through the federal Workforce Investment Act. workNet offers a variety of services geared towards individuals looking for employment, individuals looking to upgrade their skill set and business operators looking for workforce training assistance and workforce recruitment assistance. One of workNet's most popular programs is the Incumbent Worker Training Program. Under this program workNet provides a training grant for a company's current or incumbent workforce of up to \$25,000.