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Westover Hills Sees Job Boom

Nationwide Latest To Announce Employment Plans

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SAN ANTONIO -- At first glance, the tree-topped hills of Westover Hills may not look like the city's third largest jobs center that it is.

"A lot of people joke, 'Marty, there's nothing out here!'" quipped land developer Charles Martin "Marty" Wender. "We've got 23,000 jobs out here!"

Wender is watching Shamu's neighborhood boom. The far westside land that once hosted a papal mass is now blessed with financial and data centers.

Nationwide Insurance announced Thursday that it would build a data center at Loop 1604 and Hwy. 151 and employ nearly 900 workers.

Among the other centers at Westover Hills are Microsoft, Frost Bank, Lowes, Stream Realty, Valero, Christus Santa Rosa and the National Security Agency.

Data centers need affordable and reliable electricity and access to high-tech infrastructure, which Westover Hills offers, Wender said.

The area has also become a major financial center now home to offices for Hartford Insurance, Chase and Wachovia.

"Companies today are looking for campuses," Wender said. "They want parking and beautiful tree settings."

Wender bought the 3500 acres of land in 1983 and purchased five ranches from a couple of families. The plan then was to develop it into a primarily residential area, but plans have changed.

"When we solved the access problem by putting in (Hwy.) 151, that changed everything," Wender said.

The highway provided easy access from downtown and San Antonio's west side.

"The companies have gravitated here because of the people here and the ease of getting around," Wender said. "We don't have the traffic congestion you have out 281 and 1604."

Wender also credits proactive city and county leaders, a bilingual workforce and not being over the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone.

"You have all the attributes of the Hill Country, beautiful hills, oak trees but you don't have to worry about the recharge zone, hard rock, severe topography or endangered species," Wender said.

In addition to the data centers, the area is becoming home to new hospitals. The new Christus Santa Rosa Hospital is open and Methodist and Baptist Health systems have land for future hospital sites, according to Wender.

Northwest Vista College, located in the heart of the development, has seen enrollment escalate.

As for what's next, Wender confidently says, "a lot more."

"You're going to see a lot more companies out here because people now realize what we've got," Wender said.

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