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Co. to hire 300 at-home workers

Dallas Business Journal - by [Holli L. Estridge](#) Staff Writer

A Sterling, Va.-based warranty provider and support services firm, bent on changing perceptions of home-based employment, is hiring 300 in and around Wichita Falls.

N.E.W. Customer Service Cos. Inc., which provides support services for companies like Best Buy, Lowe's and DirecTV, will provide four-week training for work-at-home customer care reps. Wichita Falls, with a population of about 100,000, is located 115 miles northwest of Fort Worth near the Oklahoma state border.

Those reps, hired under the company's new work-at-home initiative, will earn an average of \$9 per hour fielding consumer calls. They will be full employees of N.E.W. but will not receive health insurance benefits.

Tim Chase, president and CEO of the Wichita Falls Board of Commerce and Industry, said N.E.W. was attracted to Wichita Falls because of its proximity to Sheppard Air Force Base.

"When military personnel undergo a transfer, their spouses can take their jobs with them," Chase said, "so long as they have a high-speed Internet connection, a land-line phone and a hands-free headset."

In turn, Wichita Falls is paying N.E.W. \$2,000 per job it creates in Wichita County and any contiguous county within the state of Texas, over the next six months.

Donna Neale, N.E.W.'s vice president of communication center operations, said Wichita Falls emerged to the top of the company's list of more than 237 potential locations because of the area's educated work force and proximity to the military base.

Neale declined to provide specifics on how much the privately held company will invest in local training. N.E.W. will use two classrooms at Midwestern State University's Dillard College of Business for instruction.

Work-from-home opportunities are growing faster than outsourcing among product service companies, said Sean Hicks, president of Bedford-based Warrantech's consumer product services division. Warrantech, which sells service contracts through retail stores and manufacturers, carries warranties for retailers like Brandsmart USA, the Home Theater Store and Pep Boys.

"The whole at-home industry in and of itself is really becoming big," Hicks said. "The labor differential you used to get from outsourcing has gotten smaller and smaller. Labor that used to cost 10 cents on the dollar is now running about 70 cents on the dollar. It just doesn't make sense."

Neale said N.E.W. structures its work-from-home program like a bricks-and-mortar call center, with separate managers, reps and quality control personnel.

N.E.W. currently has five call centers and three locations using a work-at-home labor force concept, as well as numerous traditional call centers throughout the country.

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