



Beer wholesaler plans facility

Center may employ up to 500 workers

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A prominent beer wholesaler soon will build a regional distribution facility in Surprise that is likely to become the city's largest private employer.

Crescent Crown Distributing, which ships the Heineken Keg Can and bottled Miller, Coors, Corona and Mike's Hard Lemonade, has purchased 60 acres at the 290-acre Surprise Pointe commercial complex at Litchfield and Waddell roads.

The company plans to build a 150,000-square-foot distribution center and hire 250 people upon opening, and it has the potential to ramp up to 250,000 square feet and 500 employees.

New Orleans-based Crescent Crown plans to build a similar facility in the East Valley, said company marketing manager Bill Rathbun. Though ownership of the company's Phoenix distribution plant changed hands in June, Crescent Crown will continue to lease space and operate there.

In Surprise, the company will use the BNSF railroad lines for product distribution, said city spokesman Ken Lynch.

City officials have tagged Surprise Pointe and three other neighboring commercial sites along the BNSF tracks as the city's future "employment corridor."

Skyway Business Parks I and II and Summit Business Park are also part of the corridor, which could create up to 6,000 jobs upon build-out, according to developers' estimates.

Crescent Crown Distributing plunged into the Phoenix market in 2004 after it acquired Phoenix's Pearce Beverage Co. and took over the current Phoenix distribution plant at 402 S. 54th Place.

The Arizona expansion tripled Crescent's size, raised its beer distribution to 25 million cases a year from 10.5 million and helped Crescent - at one point - become the fifth-largest wholesaler in the nation, according to the *Arizona Food Industry Journal*.

Rathbun, a Surprise resident, said the company expects increased restaurant and grocery-store openings across the West Valley.

"We know that the growth in the Valley is far southeast and west . . . opening a Surprise location makes a lot of sense for the future," he said.

Crescent Crown also packages products for the Alaskan Brewing Co., Pabst Brewing Co. and the Steel Brewing Co. It calls its list of six company initiatives the "Perfect Six Pack," according to the company Web site.

Surprise officials said they received word July 20 that Crescent Crown was coming to the Surprise Pointe complex under construction.

The complex will also be home to Arizona's first Ultra Star Cinemas movie theater, a chain stretching across California and Mexico.

Developers have planned a mixed-use concept for the complex. About 37 acres of the development will be entertainment and retail space.

Administrative offices, medical offices, warehouse and industrial space will make up the remaining portions. The complex's first outlets are expected to open by March.