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W.L. GORE TO BUILD BIOTECH CAMPUS

Ken Alltucker, The Arizona Republic

W. L. Gore & Associates has purchased about 40 acres in north Phoenix with plans to build a major expansion of its medical-products division that could eventually employ up to 800 at a new campus.

The Delaware-based company closed the \$27.2 million purchase Friday for a chunk of land off Interstate 17. The tract is located immediately west of North Valley Parkway and south of the future Dove Valley Road.

Gore initially plans to construct two buildings at the south end of the site, but it first must complete street improvements under terms of an agreement with the city of Phoenix.

Gore is already a major employer in Arizona, with about 1,650 jobs in Flagstaff and an additional 40 positions in Tempe.

The company acquired the ready-to-build land parcel from a group called Sonoran Foothills as an outlet for the overflow of jobs generated by the company's fast-growing medical-products division, which is based in Flagstaff.

"We're buying this on the basis of location," said Eve Ross, Gore's corporate counsel. "The Phoenix job market is one of the best job markets nationally in terms of being able to attract new talent. The cost of living is reasonable. We are really hoping this is an opportunity to pick up great new people."

Gore's immediate plans call for adding up to 150 positions at a leased facility located at 19th Avenue and Happy Valley Road. The company is completing tenant improvements at the site and will add jobs there when construction is complete.

Ross said company growth would dictate when the first two buildings will be constructed. It could take two years or more before the new campus is built, staffed and operational.

Phoenix officials said Gore's move brings a reputable corporation with strong ties to the city's emerging bioscience economy.

"It is a huge win for us with all the jobs they are going to bring," said City Councilwoman Peggy Neely, whose district includes Gore's planned facility. "I think this will spur a lot of other employers to move into the Valley, particularly with biosciences coming into Phoenix."

Gore has not asked for financial incentives to build in north Phoenix, but the company may be eligible for reimbursement funds when it finishes road improvements, Neely said.

Medical-device employment is one of the strong suits for Arizona's push to build a bioscience economy. Arizona ranks among the nation's leaders in medical-device employment, in part due to Gore and Medtronic in Tempe.

Ross said it's too early to tell which products will be designed, engineered and built in Phoenix. The company known for the Gore-Tex fabric makes an extensive line of medical devices, including catheters for vascular grafts and surgical meshes for hernias.

Gore assembles employees who work on all aspects of a device or project. Manufacturing, engineering, development, administrative, sales and other support jobs are typically grouped together.

The company also expects to tap the research expertise of other Valley institutions. Gore already works with researchers from the Barrow Neurological Institute and is discussing ways to collaborate with Arizona State University.

George Poste, director of ASU's Biodesign Institute, said Gore strengthens the Valley's bioscience efforts.

"I hold W.L. Gore in high esteem," Poste said. "They are a leading company in the area of medical products and a great addition to the Valley."

Gore representatives say they remain committed to keeping and growing operations in Flagstaff. The company has been in Flagstaff for more than three decades, when founder Bill Gore decided to establish operations after a hiking trip.

Flagstaff officials say they are not worried about Gore's Phoenix expansion. Gore is Flagstaff's largest private employer.

"It's wonderful they are making a decision to grow and expand in the state," said Stephanie McKinney, president and chief executive officer of the Greater Flagstaff Economic Council. "They have a lot of choices they can make. They are a global company, so this is good news for the state and the state's economy."

While Gore is committed to keeping jobs in Flagstaff, the company acknowledges that it can be difficult to recruit due, in part, to the area's escalating housing costs.

Gore's Phoenix campus will have access to Deer Valley Airport, an important consideration for a company with 7,500 employees and operations across the nation, Ross said.

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