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FIRM PLANS TO ADD 100 JOBS IN ITS MOVE TO EAST GUILFORD

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Lloyd Whittington, The Business Journal

WHITSETT -- A private company that makes cleaning products for high-tech industries likely will relocate by mid-2001 from Burlington to a new \$3 million building planned at Rock Creek Center. Terms of the deal are being finalized with Liberty Property Trust.

The company, Berkshire Corp. of Great Barrington, Mass., also plans to add 100 jobs over the next three to five years.

George Dappert, a vice president and chief financial officer for Berkshire, said this week that his company is finalizing a long-term lease with Liberty Property Trust to build a new facility off Franz Warner Parkway in Rock Creek Center in east Guilford County.

Details of the build-to suit project are still being worked out. But the building likely will be 72,000 square feet and sit on a 10-acre site that Liberty is pursuing between Shionogi Qualicaps and Pass & Seymour LeGrand, said Skip Hill, vice president and leasing manager for Liberty Property Trust.

Including land costs, the project could total \$3 million, Hill said. The building would include manufacturing, distribution and research space, Dappert said.

"We're working on it," Dappert said. "There are still a lot of t's and i's. We expect to (complete a contract) within a month or so."

In North Carolina for more than 10 years, Berkshire focused its search for a new site on eastern Guilford County largely to retain its existing work force and keep its proximity to customers and suppliers, Dappert said.

"We've outgrown the current facility, and this is a great industrial location," Dappert said.

"We knew other property was available (farther west), but it was what we considered a significant driving range from our existing location. We didn't want to be in a position where our employees believed they had to make a choice."

Dappert declined to comment on how many employees Berkshire now has in Burlington. But he did say the company would likely add 100 positions over the next three to five years. Dappert would not disclose wages, but said pay is "competitive" and that the company offers medical, retirement and life insurance benefits.

The company began searching for Guilford County sites nine months ago, including looking at the former DeSales Trading Co. building and one of three buildings in Lucent's former Falcon complex.

That deal was pre-empted when another Burlington-based company, Carolina Biological Supply, leased all three Falcon buildings for expansion.

Tom Townes, a broker with Triad Commercial Properties, had marketed the Falcon buildings to Berkshire, and says Berkshire would be a welcome addition to Guilford County.

"They are a provider ... to the high-tech industry," Townes said. "That can be viewed as a positive to this area as we continue to try to evolve into a high-tech center."

In addition to Carolina Biological's expansion, InfoNXX and AT&T each announced expansions two weeks ago that will collectively generate 600 call center jobs. Meanwhile, Legacy Classic Furniture recently doubled its lease by 70,000 square feet in Liberty's Boulders complex.

Several years ago, Liberty was a bit of a pioneer in building speculative industrial space at Rock Creek. Its first building leased immediately to I-Omega, but the second building languished until Legacy moved in about a year ago.

The recent announcements indicate momentum is gaining, but Liberty remains cautious.

"It's certainly good, but I don't know that we'd build a speculative product there again just yet," Hill said.

"As you start to see more velocity, and it is starting to pick up, we might look at that."

Townes attributes the momentum largely to the widened interstate, the ongoing construction on Painter Boulevard, the existing utility infrastructure and the ability to draw labor from Alamance and Orange counties.

"Activity is picking up dramatically. I think the start of the Painter Boulevard loop was the light switch that was thrown," Townes said.

"Until then, people hadn't believed it would happen."

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