

New facility to add jobs to South Hill area

By Holly Smith Peterson 11/2013

TriWest Healthcare Alliance to open new Veterans Affairs customer contact, support center

The South Sound will soon get a business boost with the opening of a new Veterans Affairs customer contact and support center by TriWest Healthcare Alliance, as part of a five-year, \$4.3 billion contract with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"This is the first partnership of its kind," explained TriWest spokesman Scott Celley. "It's going to be a really effective means to respond to the workload, and to serve all of the veterans seeking health care."

Only last year, in a major blow to the company, TriWest lost a major portion of its military clientele to United Healthcare. That contract change involved the exit of tens of thousands of Joint Base Lewis-McChord customers, as well as the closing of TriWest's downtown Tacoma office.

Now, however, for the next five years TriWest will be administering the VA Patient-Centered Community Care program, which serves nearly 50 percent of U.S. veterans eligible for health care. For customers in Washington and 27 other states, TriWest will have its 14,000-square-foot call center up and running on the 92-acre campus of the South Hill Business and Technology Center at the first of the year. The focus of this particular site will be to ensure high-quality management of health care facilities for veterans, as well as to provide referrals, track patient records, and coordinate patient appointments, admissions and discharges.

And that suits Phoenix-based TriWest well, said president and CEO David McIntyre, as the company already has a strong familiarity and top service record with clientele from JBLM.

"TriWest is delighted to be back in the Puget Sound, and especially in Pierce County," he said, "to continue our mission to serve our nation's heroes."

The major side benefit of the new site, though, is at least 50 new, full-time jobs for South Hill. Over time, Celley said, the company could add as many as 250 more by the end of 2014.

But why South Hill?

"TriWest originally reached out to the Tacoma-Pierce County Economic Development Board with their needs because of timeframe of the contract was coming up quickly, and they needed to get a site in place," Celley said. "The EDB and the Puyallup-Sumner Chamber made it easy to get it permitted and everything else, so that they could get the doors open by the beginning of next year."

The Benaroya Company, which owns the three-building, repurposed former wafer chip manufacturing plant property, is also thrilled to have TriWest join current Business and Technology Center tenants like Parametrix, Westwood Shipping, Group Health and Marvell Technology.

"Our park-like campus provides an exceptional quality of life, and is perfect for corporate office headquarters, high tech, financial and medical services, back-office administration, government and education," president Larry Benaroya said.

He added that approximately 194,000 square feet of Class A office space is still available there, which means there's indeed room for TriWest to grow those 250 additional jobs. As far as adding anything else to the current business mix for the area as a whole, though, Benaroya emphasized that it's perfect just as it is.

"South Hill offers a fantastic and abundant array of retail, restaurant, recreation, transportation, housing and education amenities and facilities to attract even more employers into the area," he said.