

Wipro close to choosing Atlanta location
Tech firm plans to hire 200 within a year

By MINI KOLLURI
Cox News Service

Published on: 12/09/07

Washington — New hires at Wipro's first U.S. software development center can expect to work for an "agile," "high-energy" company that helps its workers improve their skills, officials and current employees say.

Wipro, a global information technology services company based in Bangalore, India, announced last summer that it would hire 500 to 1,000 employees, from back-office trainers to software developers and engineers, for a center in the Atlanta area over the next three years.

Company officials said recently they were on the verge of choosing a location for the center, which is expected to open within a few months and hire its first 200 employees within a year.

Maggie Large, a spokesperson for the Georgia Department of Economic Development, said the state was involved with ongoing discussions with Wipro over incentives for the project. "Wipro is eligible for tax credits and the state has offered them discretionary grant money," she said.

The Atlanta operation is something of a reversal for Wipro, which is best known in the United States for "outsourcing" IT, call center and other service jobs to India and other lower-paying countries.

The company has about 6,000 U.S. employees, many of them attached to the offices of large customers. But the Atlanta center will be its first U.S. center for high-end software and engineering jobs.

"The work we're doing requires more and more knowledge of our customers' businesses, and you want local people to do that," said Wipro president and CEO for the Americas, P.R. Chandrasekhar, said in a written statement.

American employees say Wipro is no sleepy conglomerate where workers disappear into a bureaucracy.

"When a company is as huge as Wipro, we tend to view it as a huge aircraft carrier," said Randy P. Pagnotta, a senior business development manager who works for Wipro in the Philadelphia area. "On the contrary, it's more like a PT boat, very agile and dynamic, with a thin layer of management and very intimate relationship with colleagues and superiors."

Justin Schmid, a business development manager in Dallas, joined the company in 2002 as a fresh college graduate.

"I was one of the eight very, very early hires," said Schmid, who left the company in 2005 only to rejoin it 18 months later. "I wanted to be an IT consultant, but here was this company hiring recent graduates and putting them in sales positions. I decided to go for it, and since then it has been a phenomenal ride."

"We put in a lot of hours at Wipro," said Schmid, who says he works 70 hours a week. "When I switched companies, I was frustrated because I continued working hard while the others didn't care."

Pagnotta, who has also worked for Siemens, another global technology services firm, agreed that "Wipro has very high energy level, very exciting. Typically you find a slower pace in an American company."

At "Wipro you are part of a team," he said. "If you are a good team player you will do well. People joining Wipro should expect to be faced with a challenging situation every day."

As part of its plan for the Atlanta center, Wipro is collaborating with the University of Georgia system to both provide technical and other training to its employees and to sponsor continuing education for up to 40 percent of its employees.

According to Sridhar Ramasubbu, Wipro's spokesperson, among those hired for the Atlanta center will be technical associates and diploma holders who will get a chance to pursue engineering degrees.

"Engineering degrees are expensive, and this way they'll get a chance to get higher degrees," said Ramasubbu. "We do the same for the science graduates we hire in India who have three-year bachelor of science degrees."

Kennesaw State University and Southern Polytechnic State University, both based in Cobb County, have been chosen to develop a curriculum and train Wipro employees.

"Kennesaw State and SPSU are the only two public universities in Georgia that have undergraduate and graduate software courses," said Han(cq) Reichgelt, professor and dean at SPSU's School of Computing and Software Engineering. "It's very easy for us to mix and match courses and meet Wipro's requirement."

Reichgelt said Wipro's strategy to sponsor engineering degrees is the right approach, because "we have a dearth of software engineers."

As a part of their initiation into the company, the new hires will also get to go to Bangalore, Chennai or one of the other Wipro offices in India for a three- to six-month "induction program."

Pagnotta, who attended a similar program in Bangalore, described the training as "let's get something out of it," rather than "let's get through it."

Schmid, who also was trained in Bangalore, said he was impressed that the Wipro headquarters there was swank, just like "Texas Instruments or Microsoft, or like a college campus full of people."

Wipro is headed by India's richest man, Azim Premji, an engineering graduate from Stanford University.

He took over the company in 1966 at age 21, at a time when it mainly sold agricultural products such as cooking oil and laundry soap. Its name originally stood for Western India Vegetable Products.

Under Premji's leadership, Wipro moved into information technology and eventually grew into a global corporation with \$3 billion in annual revenues and dozens of Fortune 500 clients.