Microsoft, Hitachi Announce Venture In Fargo

Dave Kolpack, Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — A worldwide consulting and technology services company that plans to join forces with Microsoft Corp. says it was attracted to Fargo partly by the way residents reacted to a record-setting flood in 2009.

Microsoft officials announced Monday that Hitachi Consulting has been selected to help develop new software for the Microsoft business group based in Fargo. Hitachi was selected among several companies that submitted proposals

Mike Gillis, a senior vice president of Hitachi Consulting, said Fargo's attitude during a Red River flood that threatened to inundate the city showed him leadership, teamwork and a competitive spirit. Thousands were forced to evacuate but only about 100 structures were lost.

"Why Fargo?" he asked. "Fargo offers outstanding value: highly productive and educated people with a sense of community and Midwestern values."

The agreement would establish a technical development center in Fargo. Plans call for the enterprise to start out at the Microsoft campus and eventually move into a new facility.

Gillis expects the new venture to hire about 20 people in the first six months, but made comparisons to Hitachi's operation in India that employs about 1,700 people.

"We want to have similar success here in Fargo," he said. "We know it doesn't happen overnight, we know we won't start that way, but that's where we want to go.

Gillis predicted that Fargo "will grow to be a major technology hub for Hitachi Consulting."

Hitachi Consulting, which employs about 5,000 people worldwide, is a part of Hitachi Lt., which has about 450,000 workers "in just about every geography you can imagine," Gillis said.

North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple referenced Hitachi's numbers during Monday's announcement at Microsoft's Fargo campus.

"We thought Microsoft was the biggest company in the world, and then we find out you have five times as many employees. Welcome to North Dakota. Glad to have you," Dalrymple said, smiling.

About 1,700 people work for Microsoft's Fargo operation, which includes Microsoft Business Solutions, customer support, payroll and information technology.

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