

TABLE OF EXPERTS

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SOUTHWESTERN ILLINOIS DEVELOPMENTS

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MEET THE EXPERTS



MARC VOEGELE

Marc Voegele is a lifelong resident of Granite City. He was employed by Tubular Steel for 26 years, most recently as Midwest regional sales manager. He's been the president and owner of Express Employment Professionals in Glen Carbon since 2006 and Fairview Heights since 2014. He's a member of the Edwardsville Rotary, Southwest Madison County Chamber of Commerce, RiverBend Growth Association, EdGlen Chamber of Commerce, Troy/Maryville Chamber of Commerce, Highland Chamber of Commerce, O'Fallon Chamber of Commerce, Belleville Chamber of Commerce and Metro East Regional Chamber of Commerce organizations. Voegele is a board member of CEO High School Programs in Granite City and Alton. He's also an active member of Metro Community Church.



TED SHEKELL

Ted Shekell, community development director for O'Fallon, Illinois, since 1997, manages the city's work in economic development, comprehensive planning and zoning. He has also lectured for the past eight years in UMSL's chancellors program in planning and zoning on the topics of ethics, effective public meetings and annexation agreements, and most recently in UMSL's Fundamentals of Economic Development program on EcDev Plan Implementation. He is a member of the American Planning Association, the American Institute of Certified Planners and the Urban Land Institute. From 1992-1997, he served as executive director of the Southern Five Regional Planning Commission in southern Illinois, providing technical assistance to 23 communities and five counties in economic development, public infrastructure, grant management and planning. Shekell has a bachelor of science degree in geography from Penn State University and a master's degree in urban planning from the University of Virginia's School of Architecture.



MARK LATHAM

Mark Latham was born and raised in Streator, Illinois. He graduated from John Brown University with a bachelor of science in engineering and acquired a master's degree in leadership and ethics from John Brown University. Latham has served in municipal government for more than 39 years. He has 23 years of city manager experience in Illinois and Arkansas and 16 years as a department director in Arkansas. Latham was the visionary for Highland Communication Services. Highland Communication Services is the first and only municipal-owned fiber-to-the-home service in Illinois and the first gigabit community in the state. Highland Communication Services opened for business in June 2011.

ROUNDTABLE

PHOTOS BY
DILIP VISHWANAT | SLBJ

Southwestern Illinois Developments

► WHAT'S DRIVING GROWTH IN SOUTHWESTERN ILLINOIS?

Marc Voegle: Geography is a big part. And nationally, we're right at the crossroads of the biggest river in the United States. Two other rivers, the highway systems, the barge traffic, the airports all converge there. We're kind of unique in that no other area anywhere near us has the combination of that. The first 26 years of my life, I worked in West County and I can remember when Olive and 270 was all farmland. It's not anymore. And it's all filled in now. I see the same thing coming up on Highway 255 in the Metro East area. I think it's also interesting to watch sleepy little towns, farm towns like Edwardsville, grow into the thriving community it is now. It's neat to watch different cities evolve. Cities like Granite City are moving from a big industrial town into the logistics and warehousing segments. Then you've got towns like O'Fallon, which is a huge military hub, drawing people in big gulps.

Ted Shekell: Scott Air Force Base has over 13,000 employees, and contrary to what people may think about military installations, it's heavy on officers and operational commands. Scott has grown since the last Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission and is a huge part of O'Fallon. Probably 35 percent of our city's population is involved with the base either as a direct military or civilian employee, spouse or a retiree. It's the third-largest employer in the St. Louis Metro area behind only BJC and Boeing, and it affects the entire St. Louis region, particularly St. Clair County. I think the regional economic impact of Scott is about \$3 billion per year. And it's adjacent to us, so we're blessed in a couple of different ways with Scott, through not only its economic importance, but the people – the officers, the families and the enlisted men and women. They live in our town and they influence our schools, education levels, housing and shopping.

Mark Latham: Highland's on the edge of the Metro East. I agree with Ted that Scott Air Force Base does impact the biggest area in the Metro East because we get all the spill-over effect in population from Mascoutah to Highland and surrounding communities. I think the other two areas that I see regarding economic growth are in health care and education. I think health care is going to make huge gains in our area. It's going to see major growth, especially with what's happening not only here in Highland, where the Hospital Sisters Health System built a brand new hospital and they're building a new one in O'Fallon. I see a lot of growth in the medical area based on some of the development that's going on in the Metro East. And then also, I think the other big area that we're going to see growth is in education. There's a lot going on at Lindenwood in Belleville.



We're starting to see education gains spilling over from even SIUE and some of the other areas, and McKendree in Lebanon is growing.

► WHAT ARE THE HOTTEST GROWTH AREAS IN YOUR PART OF THE REGION?

Mark Latham: O'Fallon – the Swansea/Fairview Heights area, along with Edwardsville/Glen Carbon area and Highland. Highland has had a very respectable growth rate of almost 20 percent since 2000.

Ted Shekell: Highland is a great town. We have a lot of association personally with Highland.

Mark Latham: It's probably the only town that has any manufacturing still left in Madison County. Our biggest manufacturer is probably Eaton, which used to be Cooper B-Line. We also have Basler Electric as a major manufacturing employee.

Ted Shekell: I think the Wall Street Journal is published in Highland. It's one of five or six locations nationwide where that paper's published. The first time I saw that, I thought, "Seriously?" Highland has a nice mix of industry and business.

Marc Voegle: If I had to pick an industry, I'd say it'd be logistics. It's probably about the hottest thing in the entire Metro East region. If I look at the whole Metro East region from the big picture aspect, I get to work with companies from Jerseyville, down to Waterloo, out to Greenville, out to Nashville, putting people to work in all of those towns. I get to be involved with a lot of different companies. Along the

way, I see things like the Interstate 55 corridor project that Glen Carbon/Edwardsville has put up for planned development. And they've got Hortica. They've got Scott Credit Union's headquarters in there. Prairie Farms is moving their headquarters in there. That area will just continue to grow. You've got MidAmerica Airport which is growing steadily. You've got all the development in Belleville on Illinois Route 15. With all that area they're developing out there, you've still got Eastport in Collinsville. It's sitting right smack in the middle of the two counties. You've got Gateway Commerce, Lakeview warehouse distribution areas. And I think one of the other big ones is America's Central Port in Granite City. They just developed that South Harbor, which is the farthest north barges can go without having to get stuck with ice and locks. They've got a shipment due in here in a couple weeks with the first barge load of containers from China. And if that goes as well as they hope, that thing could just explode exponentially for the whole region. Then you got something else that's just kind of sitting underneath our noses. The new Stan Musial Bridge that's here at I-70. You start to look at all of that land across that bridge now a bit differently. There's already companies that are looking at that to take advantage of it.

Ted Shekell: O'Fallon is the fastest growing city in the Metro East in terms of raw numbers of new homes and new people, and we have been for 15 to 20 years. I've been with the city 19 years, and during that time we've had 3,737 new single-family homes built and around \$1.5 billion in residential, office and commercial construction. When I first got there, we probably had 17,000 people and now we've grown to an estimated 32,000 people. When you

collectively look at O'Fallon, Shiloh, Mascoutah, although it doesn't have the volume of a St. Charles County, it's probably the second hottest residential growth area in the St. Louis market. I think a lot of that's driven by good geography and good location, but it's more than that. It's access to jobs like those at Scott Air Force Base, we're 15 minutes to the Arch, we have outstanding schools. I can't tell you how important the O'Fallon schools are to our growth. Our high school is in the top 6 percent in the state of Illinois for academic scores, and our two K-through-8 districts are growing and putting a lot of well-prepared kids in the high school. We also have an excellent parks and rec system, solid infrastructure, and highly trained, dedicated police, EMS and fire departments. We have over 1,100 businesses in town and a documented retail trade service area of around 300,000 people, resulting in more than \$800 million in annual retail sales being generated within O'Fallon. Recently, we've been very fortunate to attract major national retailers such as Menards, Gander Mountain, Academy Sports and Carmax, all who made O'Fallon their first entry into the Metro-East market. Our downtown has also seen significant interest with the addition of locally owned shops such as Peel Pizza, Cincotta Photography, Fezziwig's, Sweet Katie Bee's cupcakes and several other similar businesses. Finally, the fourth O'Fallon interchange is under construction at exit 21 on I-64 that will serve as an additional entrance for Scott AFB and will open up over 500 acres for development on the north side of I-64 in O'Fallon. When you add all of these things up, you get major opportunities for growth and a quality of life which we are very proud of.

Mark Latham: I don't see a lot of indus-

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trial growth here locally. I think we have tried to maintain what we have as best as we know how. I hate to say. I know this is supposed to be real positive, but Illinois is not the best place in the world to have a business, and I think we struggle with that. One thing that Highland has been able to do that I've been working on for over 10 years is actually being an enterprise zone. So we coordinated with six other cities to be able to do that because of demographics to work on. So that's just another tool in our toolbox we feel that's going to help us along the road. Our whole focus has been on growing what our existing businesses are. And we are being very successful right now in the software business.

► HOW IS THE HEALTH CARE INDUSTRY IN PERFORMING SOUTHWESTERN ILLINOIS?

Marc Voegelé: I think the biggest impact is jobs and fewer reasons for people in Illinois and the Metro East to have to travel outside of that region to get there to get more specialized services. People are finding more reasons to stay in this area. I think that's the biggest impact.

Ted Shekell: Until this year O'Fallon didn't have a hospital near us. If you lived in O'Fallon, you were a 25-minute drive to get to a hospital in either Belleville or St. Louis. I think the Metro East, as a whole, was leaking health care dollars to St. Louis. Now, with the 94 bed Memorial/BJC facility opening adjacent to our city limits in Shiloh, and with the 144 bed St. Elizabeth Hospital opening in O'Fallon in the fall of 2017 at exit 16 on I-64, our community will be impacted in a very positive way through job creation and better access to health care. I think one of the advantages of both hospitals being on I-64 is that it will help them capture more of those health care dollars and patient visits that were leaking out of the area. The interstate is a vital lifeline for business. And business includes hospitals. We're glad to have them both in our area. The jobs are critical to us, with 1,300 jobs from St Elizabeth's and 670 from Memorial, so you're looking at almost 2,000 jobs locating in the O'Fallon-Shiloh area, not to mention the future spin-off growth they will bring. And in addition to job creation, they will help anchor people in our community. If you can't get convenient access to quality health care, particularly if you're a senior citizen, it's a real problem. So for our growing population in O'Fallon, access to health care is a vital part of our quality of life.

► IS THE SENIOR LIVING CARE SPECTRUM GROWING TOO?

Ted Shekell: We've had several senior projects in and around O'Fallon. We have one, as a matter of fact, that's going to our city council this month. It's a 72-unit, single family villa project. Also, Delmar Gardens has owned a 17-acre piece of ground at exit 16 for probably 10 years. They bought it to build a large nursing home and independent living facility, but they had trouble getting a certificate of need. It was very

frustrating for them and for us because there's a need for that facility in our community. I don't understand why. Maybe somebody in the State of Illinois understands why, but I don't. Maybe they'll be able to come back and get it now that there have been some changes in the state. But that is a need for our town as our population continues to grow. It's a growth industry for us for sure, and I think the hospitals will really further that.

Mark Latham: We were fortunate for the Sisters to decide to replace our hospital. That was a huge effort on both, not only their part, but on the city's part also. It is important to our residents to know that they're going to have good health care and they wouldn't have to drive 40 miles to be able to get it. Besides having great health care and having a really nice facility, it also supports those industries and people that are there. And the other thing that it does



Anywhere you go in this area, you're going to see "now hiring" signs all over the place. That speaks well for the potential of attracting even more people.

MARC VOEGELE,
Express Employment Professionals

is it provides jobs. There's probably 400 or so people that work for that hospital, and then all the other doctors around it. So it is a good economic boom outside of providing a very strong need for our seniors.

Ted Shekell: When you talk about the sustainability of a community for the long term, health care is so vital. There's no such thing as a recession-proof community. We're all subject to ups and downs with the economy, but health care jobs help to steady that out over time. We're looking

forward to the kind of long-term impacts that good health care jobs will have on our economy. It's going to make us more sustainable long term, just like Scott AFB. For example, St. Elizabeth's is initially looking at 200,000 patient visits a year, so for many of those visitors and their families, it's an introduction to your community and an opportunity for them to shop, to eat, or stay in a hotel. Also, medical related companies are starting to call us and take an interest in locating in the community.

► LET'S MOVE ON TO RESIDENTIAL GROWTH. THE CITY OF O'FALLON AND OTHER AREAS IN SOUTHWESTERN ILLINOIS HAVE HAD DRAMATIC RESIDENTIAL GROWTH. TALK ABOUT THE DRIVERS BEHIND IT.

Ted Shekell: I've mentioned the number: 3,737 new homes built since 1997. And since 2010, the average value of those

homes has been \$321,000. These are higher-end homes and it's indicative of a strong market. During the depths of the recession, we were still seeing about 110 new homes a year being built in O'Fallon. It says that people still wanted to build here, even during the worst of economic times. They still felt like it was the quality of life, quality of schools, all the amenities we've talked about. I think that's indicative of our community's quality and the opportunities that people see there.

Mark Latham: I think we've had steady growth in residential. We've seen higher priced homes that are selling. Highland also started a program that's been successful during the downturn. We saw in our historical areas homes were becoming rentals. And we have a program now where, if you purchase one of those homes in a certain part of the historical area, the city assist the buyer with a \$3,000 down payment to purchase a home. And we're seeing a great turnaround on the assessed valuation in those historical neighborhoods because these are now owner-oc-

cupied with new owners who are making an investment in the community. So that's where we're seeing a lot of growth – from rental to actually first home buyers.

► IS THAT FEDERAL MONEY? STATE MONEY? LOCAL MONEY?

Mark Latham: That's our own money. We are able to provide a program without the typical income guidelines of other state/federal programs. It has been really popular and we have seen an influx of homebuyers in the community as a direct result of this program.

Marc Voegelé: I think overall, the quality of life in the Metro East region gets overlooked or isn't really known about from people on the other side of the river. But it hasn't gone unnoticed by builders because there's a lot of builders that are operating over in the Metro East area. They've seen that and are responding to it. In addition, there's several communities throughout the Metro East that at one time or another have won awards for being top cities in this or that category. Most of those accolades don't get recognized crossing the river. I think another way to look at it, too, is, if you like Old Town St. Charles, you'll love Grafton and Alton. If you like Kirkwood, you're going to love Edwardsville and Glen Carbon. If you like O'Fallon, Missouri, you're going to love O'Fallon, Illinois.

Ted Shekell: Safety is one of the things that affect quality of life most. One of the things we've tried to create in O'Fallon is an environment where people feel safe to invest, not just their money but their family's future. When you buy a house or you build a business in a community, you want to make sure it's protected, not just from a physical standpoint but from a financial standpoint. We've tried very hard to do that. And I think we've been fairly successful. Safety is a big deal. O'Fallon's police department is one of the best in the St. Louis region, highly trained, and we have one of the lowest crime rates. Again, it's one of those layers when you start talking about safety, low crime rates, quality schools. We've also made major investments in our park system. Those add up to the quality of life where families want to be here. I'm certainly not objective. I'm a fan of O'Fallon. But I think rightfully so.

Mark Latham: We're seeing some growth. We've been very steady. Even in the downturns, we still have the ability to see new home development. We're running out of space, though. We're going to have to have some more lots developed. They're starting to fill up. We just built a brand new road around a community. It's called Veterans' Auto Parkway. It really opens up the whole east side of the community. There's a couple of developers now looking at that area for residential development. There's involvement in building a park out there – with trails to tie the community together. Highland is really into providing amenities, such as trails, as a community asset.

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I can't tell you how important the O'Fallon schools are to our growth. Our high school is in the top 6 percent in the state of Illinois for academic scores.

TED SHEKELL,
City of O'Fallon

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► **HOW IS TECHNOLOGY CHANGING THE WAY YOU CONDUCT BUSINESS?**

Marc Voegelé: How hasn't it?

Mark Latham: I think it's going to affect education. I think it's going to affect what the future jobs are going to look like. And I think for us, we've invested close to \$15 million into technology of owning it ourselves. We were the first gigabit city in the state of Illinois. And we're seeing even people that had offices downtown in St. Louis are now having the ability to work from home. So the quality of that connection to the outside world is extremely important. We have now two or three good software companies that have been developed in Highland. We've seen people come into Highland just because of the technology we have. And I think the challenge is going to be is taking some of the old blue-collar jobs that we've been used to in the Metro East, and those are now going to be turned over to people that can program those robotics and be able to do that type of manufacturing. One of the things that we have introduced into our high school is opportunity to participate in the well-respected Project Lead the Way STEM curriculum offering, which next fall will now include the option of two years of coding or programming training. So students that graduate from high school or even in two years, now, can actually get into a part-time job with our software companies and start learning and will not have to go spend \$100,000 on education. Instead, they can get a programming job and make \$60,000 to \$80,000 a year. And that's good pay for not going to school. There was a statistic that came out that by 2020 there's going to be a need of 1.5 million programmers in the United States, and only about half a million of them will be actually filled. And I know that St. Louis has done a great job in cultivating that pool. And so, we're hoping over in the Metro East that we can get that going, so we can help to add to the narrative of the success story of the region.

Marc Voegelé: Just yesterday at a Rotary meeting, I heard a presentation about Father McGivney High School. It's the first Catholic high school, new Catholic high school, in the Springfield Diocese in the last 60 years. It's starting out small, but it's well-funded. And they're approaching it with the new technology in mind. The school doesn't have books. They do everything on laptops. They just graduated 17 seniors, and they were offered just under \$3 million total in scholarships to go on to college for those 17. So evidently, it's effective.

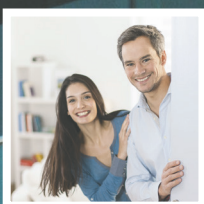
► **SO WHAT OPPORTUNITIES HAS O'FALLON REALIZED FROM INVESTING IN PARKS AND RECREATION?**

Ted Shekell: We have about 8,500 kids in O'Fallon. We've spent probably \$20 million over the last 15 years acquiring parkland and developing park space. We have a 200-acre family sports park that we are

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in the process of completing. When you have that many children in your community, you want to provide opportunities for them. Our park system gets used about 1 million times annually by our residents and visitors. For example, our splash pad had 300 kids the other day, and they were lined up waiting for it to open in the morning. The park system investments we've made have been very important, not only from a financial standpoint, but especially on the quality of life for our kids and our families. It's part of why people want to be here. Based on the preliminary research we've done, the economic impact of the sports park is between \$4 million and \$5 million a year. I think last year we had 32 tournaments, some of which had 5,000 to 10,000 people or more. And the positive impact within the community to the hoteliers, to the restaurant owners, to the gas stations, is significant. Over 10 years, it's a \$40 million to \$50 million economic impact. Our city's growth has also spurred private recreation development in town, with the most recent example being the McKendree Athletic Complex, a partnership between McKendree University and Dean Oelze, a private developer who is building in O'Fallon a \$30 million collegiate facility housing two ice rinks, diving and swim facilities, a fitness center, and associated retail. The complex will be used by the university for its athletic programs but it will also be open for use by the community.

Mark Latham: We've invested a lot of money in parks. We've been fortunate, not only do we have a great recreation center that Ralph Korte was a big part of, but we also have probably 13 other parks along with Silver Lake, and it's just another quality of life thing that you're going to need if you're going to sustain a good community that people want to come and live in. We've probably got now close to 5-mile trails which is not a lot, but we're doing it with all our own money. So it's an important piece in the quality of life standpoint.

► **WHAT STRATEGIES ARE YOU USING TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN THE NEW GENERATION WORK FORCE?**

Marc Voegelé: I think there's a variety of things that companies are doing. One is how we communicate with them. If a company doesn't have a strategy incorporating mobile devices, whether it's phone, laptops, tablets, whatever, you're missing the boat. It's kind of interesting when you stop and think that within 20 years, most – if not all – of those baby boomers will be out of the workforce. It's kind of scary in some ways, but it's also eye-opening in the sense that when we look at the younger generations and see how much they're using the new technology, they probably don't even know what the yellow pages book was. Everything we do now is on the phone. Finding directions here, on the phone. Communicating. It's all on the phone. Advertising your business now, applying online, sending your resume. That's all done via technology. Getting back to the question about attracting the new generation. This new generation is more interested in finding a balance for the work-life schedule. And while that's scary for some

employers, it's doable. If you're at least open to it, it's going to change things from the way they were done. But it's still doable. I think another one is companies are proactively embracing leadership development for developing the leadership skills to not only retain them, but also to grow them into leaders faster. Another thing that companies are doing that attracts the younger generation is they're responding to the desire to be socially responsive. It could be that you're doing something charitable in the community, but someone from Generation X or a Millennial, they'll be more attracted to a company that recognizes that, honors that, and takes part in it as well. It's more of an issue than it has been for previous generations. And I see a lot of companies doing those things to attract the younger generation. In several of our local high schools in the Metro East region, they've been involved with the CEO school program for high school seniors. That stands for creating entrepreneurship opportunities. And it was started out in Effingham eight years ago, and it's grown to where it's in 40 different school systems over six states. The program helps prepare high school students for the business world. When you're talking to them,

you think you're talking to a 30-year-old business professional because of the way they conduct themselves, the way they look, the questions they ask.

Mark Latham: We have a similar program, the Leadership Academy, developed in conjunction with University of Illinois Extension. We're trying to go more into the high schools and even into the middle schools creating a program that actually develops leadership, and assisting in developing soft skills neces-

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MARK LATHAM,
Highland Communication
Services

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sary in the workplace and allows the students to meet some of the bright, capable leaders in the community to get a broader perspective of what jobs might be available for them before they jump into college. I know the class we just graduated this past year has been very much appreciative of the fact that they understand a little bit more about what it's like to be in an actual job and what the responsibilities are going to be and how to conduct themselves in professional settings.

Our goal in Highland has been to try to make sure that the kids graduating from high school will come back, have a position, want to raise a family here because they've been raised in that community.

Ted Shekell: If you have quality of life and you have the right jobs, you're going to automatically attract that new generation workforce. They're going to go where the jobs and lifestyle are. Anecdotally, a company that you spotlighted not too long ago, Cincotta Photography, started in our downtown with three employees and was recently identified on the Inc. 5000 List of Fastest Growing Companies at No. 1,598. Sal Cincotta was a Microsoft executive and this guy could have lived anywhere in the world. He was from New York and he chose O'Fallon, in part, because of the quality of the community. I don't want to wear that theme out, but it is absolutely central to attracting people, regardless of what generation they're in. I think he has about 30 employees, mostly millennials, and they live with advanced computer technology. It's a high-energy place to go and visit.

► **WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE FOR THE METRO EAST REGION?**

Marc Voegle: I think it's a very good future. I think the potential to double the population is there. I think the probability of the rate of population growth in the Metro East growing at a faster pace is strong. If someone was looking for a place to live where you can get down to a Cardinals or Blues game pretty quickly, you might want to look at the Metro East. Right now, there's more jobs available than there are people to fill them. Anywhere you go in this area, you're going to see "now hiring" signs all over the place. That speaks well for the potential of attracting even more people. You know, we've had some hiccups like the idling of the steel mill in Granite. But that happened once before. And once again, it's already showing promising signs of coming back. We'd expect that to happen in the very near future. I see startup companies coming out of the incubators here in St. Louis and setting up shop over in the Metro East. Look at the Small Business Development Center operating out of SIUE to help what Patrick McKeehan's doing. That's fantastic. Also, there's about 100,000 people that come across the bridges from Illinois into Missouri every day. If they realize the opportunities that they have in Illinois, they might seriously start considering staying home and working in Illinois. As awareness grows, we'll see more of that. Finally, land is probably the biggest thing. If the readers were to go to Google Maps, take a look at the St. Louis area, blow it up to where you can see the entire St. Louis Metropolitan area and look at the equivalent area on the east side. You're going to see all that land. And it's affordable land. It's flat land. It's not rocky or hilly. The land is more affordable to buy. And I think that's a huge advantage, and that's why we see all these companies moving over into the Metro East, especially after they've taken and considered all the factors that go in the cost of running a business over there.

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