says. “There are significant jobs going wanting in the applied technology trades. We have great jobs in the computer industry that require a two-year certificate or an associate degree. So we want to encourage students to do all the above: trades, associates and full degrees.”

Shonnard admits that the Pluralsight gift is enlightened selfishness, a stealthy way of funding his company’s own work force development.

“Hopefully the students impacted by teachers taking these classes will work for our company in the next 10 to 20 years,” he says.

Light a match, then boon

“Spectacular!” That’s Rich Nelson’s one-word synopsis of Utah’s tech sector.

Nelson, president and CEO of the Utah Technology Council, happily adds a few more words, “It’s not just about startups anymore,” he says. “It’s about growing the 5,000 clean tech and IT companies that are already here. When you have a state tech sector that’s growing at 6.3 percent per year in numbers of companies, some really great things are happening in the individual companies.”

“When we finally got critical mass over the last 10 years, it was like striking a match,” Nelson enthuses. “It’s not surprising anymore to see companies go from 100 to 450 to 900 employees just two to four years later. Look at Pluralsight. A year and a half ago they had 20 employees; now they have 150. They’re well on their way to $100 million. InContact has gone from 200 to 900 employees in a four-year period. Boostability has gone from 150 to 200 to 450. Xactware has gone from 200 to 450. It’s explosive growth.”

“It would be easy for Utah to nurture its workforce in modest secrecy, to hoard all that talent for entrepreneurs already invested in the state. After all, some of the biggest high tech companies in the world were founded, or found a home, in the Beehive State. But Utah’s governor is more magnanimous. He wants to share the intellectual wealth. He wants his state’s economy to lead the nation and is ready to share the secret to their success.

“Our future success is tied, inextricably, to the success of our labor force and to educational excellence,” he says. “We’re right on target.”

Nice People Talking SMAC

Utah ranks fourth in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) job growth according to the US Chamber of Commerce. Photo by Salt Lake City Council and Nicole Schein

by PATTY RASMUSSEN
patty.rasmussen@siteselection.com
“Our future success is tied, inextricably, to the success of our labor force and to educational excellence. We’re right on target.”

— Governor Gary R. Herbert

Recent IT Projects

► Boston, Mass.-based Consumer United is the county’s leading independent online insurance agency. They’re creating 400 new jobs in Utah over the next seven years. “As we considered locations west of the Mississippi to accommodate our fast growing business and customer base across the country, we found that Utah not only offers an extremely attractive combination of hard working and well-educated workers, but also visionary government leaders that have created an ideal environment for economic development,” said Justin Dampel, CEO of Consumer United.

► Gig Harbor, Wash.-based Supersize Your Home plans to create approximately 350 jobs in Utah over the next 10 years and will also open a new customer software support center in Salt Lake County.

► An communications will soon expand its Utah County operations center. The company added more than 100 employees last year, with plans to create an additional 570 jobs during the next five years.

► Fireeye, a software security company headquartered in California, is expanding into Utah, creating 250 new jobs and investing $2 million into a new facility.

5,000 TECH FOCUSED COMPANIES IN UTAH

Source: Utah Technology Council

Supersize the smarts, please

Corporate executives and site selectors rate a skilled workforce as the most important criterion in most surveys when planning a high tech expansion project. This is an area where Utah excels, the secret that has so many Silicon Valley firms lined up at the Utah counter.

The state has literacy and graduation rates well above the national average, ratios that translate into a highly educated workforce pouring out of outstanding tech programs at flagship universities like the University of Utah, Utah State University and Brigham Young University. Savvy firms in incubators and accelerators statewide are ordering extra helpings of this talent to create everything from video games to medical devices.

“You have that whole network of younger, diverse, hungry workers that come in and respectfully challenge the way you do things,” says Mayne. “That’s good, and it permeates the culture within our four walls.”

It’s not uncommon for Mayne to invite a new employee, fresh from a university, to a leadership meeting to listen in. And to invite the new kid’s feedback, the new kid’s new ideas. Seriously. “In nearly every case there’s some fresh perspective offered,” he says. “That one element, more than anything in our company, has kept us ahead of the game. Every hire makes us better.”

The median age in Utah is 29.3, which plays well for the innovative tech sector where generational tech comfort helps businesses stay ahead of the curve.

Growing from a STEM cell

Recognizing the need to keep the talent pipeline gushing, Gov. Gary R. Herbert made science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education a top priority for his administration. In 2013, the state legislature approved $10 million to create the Utah STEM Action Center to coordinate STEM education and activities statewide. This year, the legislature further primed the workforce development pump with an additional $20 million for the STEM Action Center.

And it’s working. On August 1, the governor was on hand at the opening of Pluralsight’s new headquarters in Farmington to announce an exciting public-private STEM initiative with far-reaching consequences.

A global leader in online training for technology and creative professionals, Pluralsight is offering its extensive library of IT, software development, open source and creative skills courses to Utah’s K-12 educators for free for the next 12 months. The donation, valued at $5 million, will allow teachers to become conversant in the knowledge and training that industry wants and their students need for jobs in the tech field. (And there will be plenty of them. An estimated 1 million computing jobs will be vacant by 2020, nationally.)

“We’re hoping this gift becomes a long-term partnership that evolves as we see how teachers use it,” says Aaron Skonnard, Pluralsight CEO. “We think there’s something powerful there and that learning about technology and how to control it is a form of literacy for the future.”

Gov. Herbert lauds Pluralsight’s initiative for the impact it will have on all students. All of them — not just those going for a four-year degree.

“You have that whole network of younger, diverse, hungry workers that come in and respectfully challenge the way you do things. That’s good, and it permeates the culture within our four walls.”

— Lonnie Mayne, president, InMoment, greets guests in his favorite corporate attire, AKA men’s dress code.

6.9 BILLION ANNUAL TECH PAYROLL

Source: Utah Technology Council

2 SEPTEMBER 2014 | A SITE SELECTION INVESTMENT PROFILE: UTAH

A SITE SELECTION INVESTMENT PROFILE: UTAH | SEPTMBER 2014 3