

## **Downtown Dallas makes headway in luring new companies, more jobs**

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Business owners across the country last year announced plans to bring more than 5,000 jobs to central Dallas, as the city's core made headway in an effort to keep some new employers from heading to the suburbs.

In its annual report, expected to be released Friday, Downtown Dallas Inc. highlighted a stronger stream of job growth announcements in 2014. And compared with 2013, there was a nearly 70 percent jump in the level of leasing activity in the 8.5-square-mile central district.

The area covered by the report includes 15 neighborhoods, stretching from Uptown on the north to the Cedars and South Side areas. It also extends from Baylor and Deep Ellum on the east to the rapidly growing Design and Riverfront districts west of the downtown core.

In the past 10 years, central Dallas has welcomed a number of major tenants, many of them coming from elsewhere in North Texas, said Kourtny Garrett, executive vice president of Downtown Dallas Inc.

In 2014, the urban center proved to have broader appeal.

"We've had one or two big [relocation] stories each year, but this is the first year that we've had multiple companies, with more than a thousand employees, coming from outside of the region," she said. "Which is even more important to us as we think about growing the city of Dallas as a whole.

"We are finally beginning to see those out-of-state relos coming in, and we can truly say that these are thousands of jobs that are 100 percent new to the market," she said. "For us, that's really a big story."

About 70 percent of the new jobs, she said, are associated with three firms: Omnitrac, Active Network and Santander.

Omnitrac is a fleet management services company that was based in San Diego. Active Network, which also was based in San Diego, is a software firm that plans to move 1,000 jobs to Dallas.

The move of consumer finance company Santander Consumer USA Inc. from a building near Love Field, is expected to bring 1,150 jobs to downtown Dallas.

Also during the year, companies signed leases for 2.5 million feet of space in central Dallas, including 1 million square feet of new leases. Of the 1 million, 675,000 is related to Omnitrac, Active Network and Santander.

Built-up central Dallas, however, may not “fit everyone's business model,” Garrett said, especially companies looking for wide-open spaces.

In one of the largest corporate moves announced last year, auto maker Toyota said it would create a 1 million-square-foot campus in Frisco. The 100-acre, \$300 million campus will house at least 4,000 employees.

“Toyota was seeking a campus environment, and we have very few opportunities for that,” she said.

The greater downtown area does have a collection of noteworthy restaurants, the Arts District and buildings tall enough to sport a corporate logo that can be seen for miles.

“In terms of being competitive, it's really a matter of selling what we do best,” she said. “We are a downtown. We’re looking at corporations that do want their name on a high-rise, that have the employee demographic that wants to be downtown.”

She said the lifting of the Wright Amendment gives an airport near downtown, Love Field, broader appeal.

And, retailers are slowly responding to consumer complaints that the downtown shopping options consist largely of Neiman Marcus and CVS.

She noted the retail outlets added at The Joule Hotel and the addition on Main Street of the Kettle Drum Allie Boutique. The Joule options are also mainly high end. The new boutique is a bit more wallet-friendly.

The basement-level women’s clothing shop offers sunglasses for \$12 and Mind Code jeans for about \$40.

“Where we were in that Main Street core even three years ago is very different than where we are today,” Garrett said, noting that the refurbished Statler hotel property also will have retail. “We will be drastically different in two to three years.”