

Quality Jobs Program boosts its numbers

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OKLAHOMA CITY – The state’s Quality Jobs Program is close to topping last year’s figures, and the program is just halfway through the 2012 fiscal year.

In December, the Oklahoma Department of Commerce accepted more Quality Jobs participants than in any month since the program was launched in 1993, said spokesman Dustin Pyeatt.

“Two reasons for those figures,” Pyeatt said. “The Commerce Department promotes the incentives and makes it a point to alert companies about the incentives. We hold workshops in Oklahoma City and Tulsa and walk these representatives through the process.”

Secondly, state business recruiters and economic development teams travel outside the state, talking up the incentives with company CEOs, he said.

Manufacturing continues to lead the way in the number of companies and jobs entering the incentive program, Pyeatt said.

“Manufacturing is the central focus of the program,” Pyeatt said. “Manufacturing accounted for more than half of the jobs created through the incentive program because many companies base their research and development operations in a central location.”

Companies must earn the incentives, Oklahoma Secretary of Commerce Dave Lopez said in a statement, and the program is performance-based.

“If a company doesn’t create any jobs, there are no incentive payments,” Pyeatt said. “If a company closes or moves outside Oklahoma, we stop incentive payments.”

No state money goes outside Oklahoma, Pyeatt said.

And the state Commerce Department expects results from Gov. Mary Fallin’s survey of state executives, Pyeatt said. The state received more than 5,300 surveys from business executives, he added.

“No state has ever done this before,” Pyeatt said. “This will be a powerful tool during the next session on how to craft incentive programs and drive legislation.”

The survey results will be released in conjunction with the opening of the legislative session in February, he said. The survey was designed to track economic issues the state can improve on and identify ways to support companies with economic development.

“We will see how Oklahoma is doing and where the state needs to go next,” Pyeatt said. “The survey results will be like a road map for state leaders.”

Since its inception, the Quality Jobs Program has issued more than 612 contracts to companies locating and expanding in the state, Pyeatt said in a statement. Startup businesses have brought thousands of jobs to Oklahoma, he said.

In the first six months of this fiscal year, which began on July 1, 26 companies enrolled, Pyeatt said, just eight short of the 34 that enrolled in all of 2011.

The average projected wage of jobs created through the QJP this year tops the state’s average job wage of \$38,882 by 77 percent, Pyeatt said in a statement. The average so far in FY 2012 is \$68,805.

Much of the gain in average wages is due to Boeing, Pyeatt said.

Boeing, which this month said it would move 800 jobs from Wichita and 100 jobs from the Seattle area to Oklahoma City, has already applied for benefits from the QJP for 462 jobs in FY

2011, Pyeatt said.

"Boeing has been a factor this year," Pyeatt said. "First we accepted 207 jobs into the program, then another 255."

During the first half of FY 2012, 85 percent of companies in the QJP were existing businesses that expanded in Oklahoma, according to a release. That amount topped the number of expanding businesses last year by 9 percent.

Startup companies entering the program through the first half of the fiscal year made up the other 15 percent, according to the release.

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