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Lockheed Martin locking in support for its new center

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Lockheed Martin will soon open an operations center in the South Pointe Business Park in Clinton. The company plans to employ 350 people initially, but executives say the figure could grow. / Duckworth Realty/Special to The Clarion-Ledger

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Written by **Ruth Ingram**

When Lockheed Martin announced it was putting a 350-person support center in Clinton, Billy Newson heard someone say: "How are they going to build planes there?"

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"We build more than planes," Newson, the defense contractor's director of mission services, told Clinton Chamber of Commerce members Thursday.



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Although the Maryland-based company is proud to say it builds the military's F-22 Raptor and the F-117 Nighthawk, "when we explain what we do, a lot of people are surprised," Newson said.

Lockheed Martin is the top federal contractor for the government, he said. That's where the Clinton center will come in.

"We are a critical part of the support of federal agencies and their missions," Newson told the crowd, which included more than a dozen elected officials as part of the chamber's annual salute to government.

The Clinton employee base will provide information technology and customer service support, he said.

"If you're a victim of identify theft and you call and register a complaint, you're calling us. If you call HUD about your mortgage, you're calling us," Newson said. "These are some of the things we'll be bringing here.

"We will supply and assist federal customers in delivery of their mission, whatever their mission is. We will start off with civilian agencies and expand to defense."

Lockheed Martin will occupy about 30,000 square feet in the sprawling South Pointe Business Park, former home to now-defunct WorldCom.

Lockheed Martin's arrival will boost occupancy at the business park to about 65 percent, said Breck Hines, executive vice president and principal with Duckworth Realty, which manages the property. It will join ADP, Verizon, University Physicians and others.

The operation goes live in three weeks, Newson said. "We're wrapping up our construction, dotting the I's and crossing the T's."

Already, he said, Lockheed-Martin has hired 65-70 Clinton employees.

"For the 100 positions we posted, we had 3,000 applications," Newson said. "That's a demonstration that the resources and talent are available."

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Written by **Ruth Ingram**

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A "hiring event" in the fourth quarter will bring the Clinton employee base to 150, he said. Another in the first half of 2012 will bring it up to 350. The company also has been taking applications on its website.

That 350 figure "is our minimum number," he said.

Hines said he hopes the existing businesses success will result in the leasing of additional space at the office park. But he said about half of the 85-acre campus is available for future development.

By the end of 2012, he said, Lockheed Martin will bring an annual payroll of \$12 million to the community. Already, he said, the company has invested \$3 million through construction and equipment and supply purchases.

"We bought TVs from Cowboy Maloney," he said, drawing a bevy of appreciative smiles.

"We're not just putting money into the community, but jobs. We want to make sure we're an integral part of the community," Newson said.

Lockheed Martin also has facilities in Vicksburg, Biloxi and the Stennis Center in Bay St. Louis.

Main Street Clinton manager Tara Lytal said the update on the new mission center made its impending opening "very real.

"I was so encouraged by what he shared with us, and certainly by

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the number of jobs they eventually will have," Lytal said. "They really want to invest in the community, and they are sensitive about putting dollars back into the economy here."

Every businessman and businesswoman in Clinton will benefit from the relationship with Lockheed Martin - and vice versa, said Jerry Stribling, vice president and commercial banker for BancorpSouth in Clinton.

"It is such an asset for them to be here," Stribling said.

"The greatest thing he (Newson) said today is that there may be the possibility of additional jobs. We hope that's the case," said Charlie Horhn, director of external affairs for 2nd District U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson. The Democratic congressman was among government officials and economic development leaders instrumental in bringing the mission center to Clinton.

Plans call for an Oct. 19 grand opening, Newson said.

"This facility is world-class," he said of South Pointe, which sponsored Thursday's chamber luncheon. "Whenever I bring our leadership down here, they say this is better than their headquarters."

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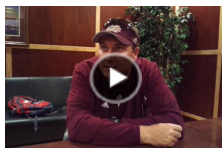
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