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Best Buy will bring bringing 550 jobs to Bullitt

Geek Squad City a first for company

By **Robert Schoenberger**
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Two years ago, Wes Snyder proposed changing how retailer Best Buy handled computer repairs.

Instead of sending systems with pesky problems to a handful of small repair shops across the country, the business team leader suggested shipping them to one huge service center, where hundreds of technicians with access to thousands of hard-to-find parts could pinpoint problems and find solutions.

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Yesterday, Snyder and state officials announced the formation of Geek Squad City, a center in Bullitt County that should open late this summer and, by the end of the year, employ 550 people with salaries averaging \$44,000. Snyder's title as director of the repair plant will be mayor, and he carries a badge saying as much.

GEEK SQUAD CITY

Best Buy will begin hiring people this month to staff its technical support center in Bullitt County. The retailer expects to have 550 workers by the end of the year. Best Buy said it is looking for experienced technical support specialists.

- To apply, go to www.geeksquad.com and click on Become an Agent. Then click on Geek Squad City.
- Listings will be posted this summer at greaterlouisvilleworks.com and other employment sites.

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"This facility is going to be a nerve center for Geek Squad members everywhere," Snyder said, referring to Best Buy's computer technical support unit.

In announcing the deal, Gov. Ernie Fletcher praised shipping company UPS, saying its Louisville air-cargo hub helped attract the Geek Squad campus.

"Without our partnership with UPS, we would not be able to attract these kinds of projects," Fletcher said. Best Buy plans to ship computers to the center in the morning and have them repaired and back to UPS that evening, ideally offering a two-day turnaround for computer repairs.

Fletcher said the jobs being created by Best Buy are ideal for the area. The positions pay well, and the technically sophisticated work will offer young people more opportunities to stay in the area.

"We like geeks," Fletcher said. "We definitely have the work force (available)."

In March, the state approved \$9.3 million in tax breaks to win the project. Best Buy estimates it will cost \$8.7 million to set up the center in Hillview.

While most repair work will still be done at Best Buy stores across the country, Snyder said store technicians will send difficult-to-repair jobs or jobs that would require waiting several days for parts to the center.

"We can't carry all of the parts that might ever be needed at every store. ... This will be the largest parts depot we've ever dealt with," he said.

Best Buy's site in the Prologis 65 Business Park is a 165,000-square-foot warehouse. Best Buy recruiting director Kathy Gullickson said the floor space will be split about evenly between shipping and work space. About one-third of the employees will wear the uniforms seen in television commercials for the Geek Squad -- black pants and white, short-sleeved shirts with thin black ties and badges.

Employees will have job titles such as "counter intelligence agent" for workers who repair computers on long tables or counters and "double agent" for technicians who repair systems both in the shop and at customers' homes and

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businesses.

Snyder said Geek Squad City will either offer tours or be open for inspection, giving people "the chance to see geeks in their natural habitat."

While the company tries to keep a lighthearted atmosphere at its stores and in its advertising with the strange titles and the 1960s government 1agency inspired dress code, Snyder said it all has a serious side. Geek Squad services are marketed to people who use computers but may not be as technically experienced as other buyers.

"We used the uniforms and the tongue-in-cheek humor to relax the customer. This can be scary, technical mumbo-jumbo for them, so we try to get them to have a little bit of fun with it," Snyder said of the technical support experience.

Reporter Robert Schoenberger can be reached at (502) 582-4669.

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