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Tech growth for Grass Valley Circuit company looks to open design lab

[David Mirhadi](#)



Employees of Linear Technologies work at one of the company's design centers. Linear is a maker and designer of semiconductors and integrated circuits for cell phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs). The company plans to open a design center in Grass Valley in the coming months.

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Western Nevada County's tech corridor is poised to grow, with representatives of a Milpitas-based circuit manufacturer scheduled to arrive in Grass Valley Wednesday to scout out potential sites for a design center.

Linear Technology, a Fortune 500 company with 2,600 employees worldwide, plans to hire a handful of local residents to open its design center in the coming months.

The company, founded in 1981 by Robert Swanson, a former vice president at National Semiconductor, designs and manufactures integrated circuits - key components used to power cell phones, personal computers and personal digital assistants.

The company rolled out its first products two years after forming and now operates eight design centers across North America and Singapore, including Colorado Springs, Boston and Santa Barbara.

What once was an embryonic endeavor in the first days of the personal computer has turned into a \$30 billion business powering many small electronic devices, including Web-enabled, camera-equipped cellular phones and other hand-held components.

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"We knew the digital revolution would spur demand for analog circuits," Swanson said. In 2001, he said, 30 billion integrated circuits were in use. "The high performance end has grown even faster."

Swanson has hired a project manager and four designers, culled locally. There are plans to rent up to 5,000 square feet space for as many as 20 designers.

Of the company's expansion plans, Swanson said, "We have to look beyond Silicon Valley."



Linear Technology, a Fortune 500 company, is based at its world headquarters in Milpitas.
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In Boston, the company uses 70,000 square feet for 60 designers. In Colorado Springs, Linear Technology has a 50,000 square-foot facility.



Swanson
[Zoom](#)

The company sells equipment to companies such as Ericsson, Nokia, Cisco Systems, Nortel Networks and Lucent Technologies.

"You name the customer, we probably sell to them," he said.

The military also uses integrated circuits in their communication packs and headsets.

Swanson said the company's arrival in Grass Valley is crucial to keeping up with demand.

"The conviction to me is, not only is (the telecommunications industry) going to need my products, but they're going to be essential."

The company's competitors include Texas Instruments, Motorola, Maxim Integrated Products and National Semiconductor, which has a 38-employee design center in Nevada City that opened eight years ago.

Swanson said competition for his business has improved the product.

"We're all trying to figure out how to best each other. We all know the market, and at the

end of the day ... we know we can come up with a design where we've each created a niche that somebody has missed."

No one group dominates the market, Swanson said, because the market is growing too fast.

Linear Technology should be operating locally within the next 30 days, Swanson said, with expansion following quickly. "We're ready to hire more people, as soon as we can find them."

LINEAR TECHNOLOGY AT A GLANCE

Business: Designers and manufacturers of analog integrated circuits, which help power cellular phones, personal digital assistants (PDAs) and other personal electronic devices.

Headquarters: Milpitas.

Chairman/CEO: Bob Swanson.

President: David Bell.

Employees: 2,600 in design centers across North America and Singapore.

Sales, fiscal year 2002: \$512 million

Net income, fiscal year 2002: \$197 million

Stock price: Traded on Nasdaq stock exchange under symbol LLTC. Closed Monday at \$36.05, up \$1.29 from Friday.