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High-tech design center on the grow



Peter Bajka, left, owner of Linear Technology's new Grass Valley office, shakes hands with the company's vice president of engineering, Robert Dobkin, at an open house Thursday. Shown left to right between the two are the company's Grass Valley design center manager Ralph Andersson, satellite design center director Chris Mann and company President David Dell.

The Union photo/Pico van Houtryve [Zoom](#)

[Jamie Bate](#)

Unlike other high-tech leaders who came to Nevada County and then went with the industry's bust, the president of Linear Technology Corp. promises stability.

A couple of years after TDK, Time Domain Corp. and a few other tech companies either folded or pulled up stakes in the county, Milpitas-based Linear Technology opened up a small four-person design center locally in July. Now Linear is in new, leased 5,000 square feet of space in the Whisperin

g Pines Business Park.

And the company has no intention of being hemmed in for long, said David Bell, Linear's president.

"When we fill this up, we're going to get bigger," he said. "We've got staying power."

Bell noted that Linear, which posted 40 percent after-tax profits, has more employees working in what the company calls "satellite design centers" than it has at its headquarters in the Silicon Valley. In all, Linear has about 2,600 employees, most of whom are spread out in design centers in Vermont, Massachusetts, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Colorado, Singapore, Santa Barbara and now Grass Valley.

"We're a very stable company," Bell said. "We haven't shut down a single design center."

The company's plan for Nevada County is simple, said Ralph Andersson, manager of the Grass Valley design center.

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"Our long-term plan is to grow this place," he said. "We want to be a fixture in this community."

Andersson said Linear has immediate openings for analog engineers. The center in Grass Valley can support a staff of 20, but once that number is reached, "it's not going to stop hiring," he said. "We're going to be top heavy with engineers, very heavy on the brain side."

Such brains are responsible for helping get the Spirit and Opportunity rovers onto the Red Planet.

"We have 54 parts on Mars," said Robert Dobkin, Linear's vice president of engineering.

Some of Linear's products on Mars were used for camera motion control to allow the rovers to "see" the Martian landscape and digitize the images for their journey back to Earth.

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