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Warehouses at home in Tulare Co.

By Bob Rodriguez

Tulare County is fast becoming the latest central San Joaquin Valley community to attract large-scale distribution warehouses to the region.

Paul Saldaña, president and chief executive officer of the Tulare County Economic Development Corp., said companies are drawn to the area by its affordability, central location and cooperation of city officials.

Saldaña said the EDC is working with eight companies that have expressed interest in locating to Tulare County.

"We are getting more attention, and we expect that to continue," Saldaña said.

Officials with real estate firm Grubb & Ellis/Pearson Commercial said there are several companies looking for 1 million-plus square feet in Tulare County.

"This is a great area because of its location," said Lou Ginise, a senior vice president with Grubb & Ellis/Pearson Commercial's industrial division. "People want to avoid the congestion of the Inland Empire and Northern California. And when land prices go up elsewhere, that also gives us an advantage."

Tulare County already is home to several large-scale industrial parks with the capability of expanding to meet the massive square footage needs of distribution centers.

And more space could be on the way.

Tulare city officials have identified a 272-acre site south of Mefford Field airport for industrial and manufacturing use.

"We are very happy with our agricultural base, but we also recognize that we are on the main line of Union Pacific and on 99 and that is ideal for manufacturers and distribution centers," said Bob Nance, Tulare's redevelopment director.

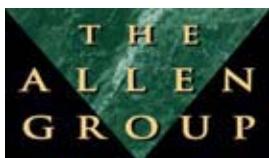
The most recent distribution center to locate to Tulare County is the International Paper Co.

The company recently moved to a new 252,040-square-foot center in the MidState 99 industrial park at Goshen Avenue and Plaza Drive in Visalia.

A Fortune 100 company, International Paper is a global supplier of uncoated paper and packaging materials.

Built by the Allen Group, MidState 99 also built two industrial buildings near International Paper that total 280,000 square feet and are available for lease. The MidState 99 industrial park has 11 buildings with more than 3 million square feet of space. The tenants include, VF Corp., JoAnn Stores, Coast Distribution Systems, Workflow One, Worms Way, Bound Tree Medical and DATS Trucking.

Also building on a large scale is the Fresno-based Diversified Development Group. Last year, the company built a 500,000-square-foot distribution center for Spectrum Brands in its Plaza Drive Industrial Park in Visalia.



From Visalia, the company ships batteries, personal-care products and home and garden items to seven western states.

Developers say that businesses can reach more than 65 million consumers within a two-day truck run from Visalia.

And as the price of fuel continues to rise, transportation costs are becoming a bigger factor in choosing a new location.

"These days, deals are done on a transportation-related basis," said Jon Cross, marketing director for the Allen Group.

