

Honoring their firm commitment

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By Joyce Pellino Crane, Globe Correspondent | December 18, 2008

While much of corporate America is laying off workers, five area companies were recently lauded by a consortium of business and public officials for reinvesting in Massachusetts instead of moving out of state.

Aspect Software, [Evergreen Solar](#), Ophir Optics, Shire Human Genetic Therapies, and [Spire Corp.](#) were recognized by the Massachusetts Alliance for Economic Development, a nonpartisan group that helps match interested businesses with available properties, for expanding their workforces or facilities. Last month, they were among 19 companies or organizations cited during the alliance's annual Economic Impact Awards ceremony.

Aspect Software Inc., Chelmsford

One of five gold award winners, Aspect Software Inc. folded its 2005 Westford acquisition into its Chelmsford location last year, and now occupies more than 133,000 square feet at 300 Apollo Drive, where 300 are employed.

MassEcon honored Aspect, said Aleassa Chambers, corporate marketing manager, because the company's yearlong construction project near Interstate 495 and Route 3 stimulated jobs for local contractors and vendors. "This was the largest project along the 495 corridor during that time," Chambers said of \$6.4 million investment.

Aspect provides routing and scheduling software to companies that operate contact centers for customer service, collections operations, and sales processes.

Evergreen Solar, Devens

Evergreen Solar Inc., another gold award winner, is seeing the investment in its Devens manufacturing facility already paying off. This summer, the Marlborough-based company announced a \$1.2 billion contract with Germany's IBC Solar AG with the completion of the plant's first phase. It has a \$3 billion backlog of sales for all contracts through 2013. The global demand has brought 480 new jobs to the 450,000-square-foot plant at a cost of \$430 million. The ongoing second phase will make room for a total of 800 manufacturing workers and provide \$44 million in salaries and benefits. Completion is expected by the end of next year.

"The whole renewable energy business has been very, very strong," said Chris Lawson, Evergreen's director of marketing communications. Lawson said the company considered building its manufacturing plant in other states, but won financial incentives and a commitment of support from Governor Deval Patrick's administration.

Evergreen manufactures solar cells and photovoltaic solar panels. It has a proprietary "string ribbon" wafer technology that uses less silicon than a typical solar panel, helping to lower the cost of production.

Ophir Optics Inc., North Andover

In 2003, when Dennis Cope, president of Ophir Optics Inc., opened shop, he was the company's sole employee. Three years later, he had 50 highly trained manufacturing workers on board, necessitating a move from the company's 19,000-square-foot Wilmington plant to a larger facility.

Company officials scouted out locations as far north as Amherst, N.H., said Julie Long, its finance director, before deciding to remain in the state, and moved the operation in January to a 32,000-square-foot facility at the former [Lucent Technologies](#) campus in North Andover, earning a bronze award from MassEcon.

The decision came down to two considerations, said Long. The building at 1600 Osgood St. had the necessary infrastructure to handle Ophir's complicated manufacturing process, and the region's workforce was too valuable to lose.

"The investment we make to train the employees is quite extensive," she said, "so our focus was retention."

Long said the company, which manufactures infrared lenses for military and civilian uses, anticipates hiring about 30 more employees next year.

Shire PLC, Lexington

Shire Human Genetic Therapies, a business unit of the British company Shire PLC, also received a gold award from the alliance for its project to relocate its Cambridge operation to a 550,000-square-foot facility on the former [Raytheon](#) campus in Lexington over the next four years.

The company, which invested \$394 million in the Patriot Way expansion, employs about 850 workers between the two sites, and expects to add 680 employees over the next eight years, according to spokeswoman Jessica Cotrone, including 200 next year.

Governor Patrick's support of life-sciences research persuaded company officials to remain in the state, according to Cotrone. Since then, Shire has become a member of the Lexington Chamber of Commerce and became involved with Lexington High School's biotechnology program. Shire HGT manufactures specialty drugs for children with rare genetic diseases.

Spire Corp., Bedford

In January 2007, the Spire Corp. employed 120 employees. Today, it has 260 scientists, engineers, technicians, and salespeople on the payroll, while expanding its 90,000-square-foot Bedford facility to 144,000 square feet, a success story that earned MassEcon's silver award.

"The solar industry . . . has grown 40 percent every year over the past three years," said Christian Dufresne, Spire's chief financial officer.

Current year-to-date revenues of \$49 million rocketed from \$25 million for the same nine-month period last year, said Dufresne.

Spire sells solar energy equipment and manufactures biomedical devices and semiconductors.

Joyce Pellino Crane can be reached at crane@globe.com. ■