

Local News

Talent drain?

Local industry leaders are looking over their shoulders

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With DaimlerChrysler expected to bring 3,300 well-paying jobs into the area economy, leaders of businesses that are already here might be excused for wondering if some of their most highly skilled employees will be lured away.

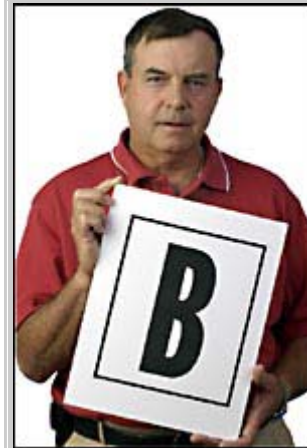
"People are thinking about it, and they're concerned," said Danny MacMillan, chairman of the Manufacturer's Council, a Savannah Area Chamber of Commerce committee made up of local industry leaders. "We're watching it. But what can you do, except roll with the punches?"

It helps -- from the viewpoint of other local employers -- that DaimlerChrysler's Sprinter van plant will be non-union.

Its reported average salary of \$22.50 an hour comes out to \$900 before taxes for a 40-hour week -- a figure more or less in line with what highly skilled workers already earn at the area's top-paying companies.

Many of DaimlerChrysler's employees will come from outside the Chatham County area. Still, workers at local companies are no doubt taking a hard look at the carmaker's plans, and calculating whether they have the education and experience needed to make a go of it at DaimlerChrysler.

"You bet you've got a challenge there (for existing local employers)," sa Roger Herman, CEO of the Herman Group, a Greensboro, N.C.-based



Danny MacMillan -Special to the Savannah Morning News

Current position:
Chairman of the Manufacturer's Council, president of Alloy Industrial Contractors Inc.

Represents: Area employers who are concerned about the drain on company talent pools once DaimlerChrysler opens.

consulting firm that specializes in employee retention issues.

Don't call it a brain drain, Herman said. Rather, call it a potential talent c of skilled workers from established companies.

"The threat is very real, and it will be based just partially on the money t going to be offered by the new employer," Herman said. "It will also be based on the opportunity for people to leave where they are."

Workers became accustomed to being highly mobile during the late 199 Herman suggested. When the economy took a downturn, people weren able to move around as much.

As a result, "there's a pent up energy today," Herman said. "There are e of people that would like to move from where they are, not so much for where they're going but to escape from where they are."

Nationwide, up to 30-40 percent of workers are thinking more about job hunting than on improving performance at their current job, Herman sai

Of course, some workers will likely conclude that the pastures are entire green enough right where they are.

Some of them already earn more than they might at DaimlerChrysler.

Big paper manufacturers -- think Georgia Pacific and International Pape pay \$1,144 weekly on average to almost 3,300 employees in Chatham, Effingham and Bryan counties, according to 2001 salary figures from th Georgia Department of Labor.

If you work for one of the 20 companies involved in making transportati equipment (think business jet manufacturer Gulfstream Aerospace), you already pulling down \$1,059 a week on average.

Indeed, Gulfstream spokesman Robert Baugniet doesn't sound like a m who's worried. "I believe it's good for Georgia, good for this area, and g for all businesses when a big company like DaimlerChrysler attracts peo to the area," Baugniet said. "We're very excited by the prospect."