

Austin job creation effort beats goals

Initiative launched in 2003 to attract 72,000 jobs exceeds expectations, chamber says.

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In 2003, when Central Texas had yet to shake off the tech bust, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce launched a major initiative to bring 72,000 new jobs to the region within five years.

Opportunity Austin, as the program is called, exceeded the goal in three years, chamber officials said Wednesday.

From 2003 through 2006, Central Texas gained 80,900 jobs. The gains came from a wide variety of industries, including retailers and restaurants, road builders and engineering firms, as well as high-tech firms.

"We clearly have the strongest metro economy in the country right now," said Mayor Will Wynn. "Fundamentally, we can't rest when it comes to job creation because we continue to grow."

Employment highlights

Jobs created: 80,900 in the past three years, including **33,100 in 2006.**

Payroll increase since 2003: \$3.5 billion expected by the end of 2008.

Corporate relocations: 36.

Relocations from California: 19, more than any state.

Expansions: 67.

Biggest win: Samsung Electronics' \$3.5 billion chip plant, under construction.

2007 targets: Lure more California companies to Central Texas; continue recruitment efforts for data centers, biotech and wireless companies and Toyota suppliers; pitch the region to digital media and clean energy companies.