

# JOURNAL OF BUSINESS

Serving Spokane  
& Kootenai Counties

Reprinted from the January 24, 2008 issue of the Journal of Business, Spokane, Washington.  
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## WDS boosts operations in Spokane

*Office to employ roughly 40 people initially, could house up to 70 workers*

By Emily Proffitt

OF THE JOURNAL OF BUSINESS

Washington Dental Service, the state's largest dental benefits provider, says it has expanded its presence in Spokane by opening a larger office here and moving some administrative functions to Spokane from Seattle.

The Seattle-based insurer opened its new office here earlier this month in a 13,000-square-foot leased space in the Iron Bridge Corporate Center, located along the Spokane River near Gonzaga University, says spokesman Sean Pickard. Previously, WDS had operated a 3-person sales office here at 104 S. Freya, in the Tapio Office Center, he says.

Initially, the company will employ between 30 and 40 people mostly new hires from the Spokane area—at its new office, but the space could hold up to 70 workers, Pickard says.

In addition to sales, the office will house functions the company has moved here from Seattle, including group administration, clinical review, provider maintenance, and information-technology, he says.

In addition to the branch office here, the insurer also operates a customer-service center in Colville, Wash., which it opened in 2002, Pickard says. That call center now employs more than 100 people, he says.

WDS, which employs about 340 people companywide, decided to expand its operations here for several reasons, says Jim Dwyer, its president. The labor market in Seattle is tightening, and real estate and

labor prices there are rising, making Spokane a more attractive expansion option, he says. Spokane also provides a nearby "relief valve" for its call center in Colville, since the company doesn't have additional space in which to expand in that northeast Washington town, he says.

"Many of our competitors are moving their claims processing and customer service offshore, but we wanted to stay in Washington state," Dwyer says. "Spokane gives us a good, solid employment base with easy access to our Seattle headquarters"

He adds, "If our experience in Spokane is anything like we've seen in Colville, it wouldn't surprise me if we were at 100 employees within the next few years and looking for more space."

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