City impresses Perceptis CEO

'Perfect weekend' spurs move here

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Bill Bradfield, chief executive of Perceptis Inc., was considering four possible locations for his company's headquarters and showcase call center when he experienced what he called a "perfect" weekend in downtown Greenville.

He remembered stepping onto Main Street from the lobby of the Westin Poinsett Hotel one Saturday morning last October with his wife and two other Perceptis executives and their wives.

"We walked out the door and it was 70 degrees and the sun was shining and it was getting warmer and there was a street festival going on," Bradfield recalled.

"And I'd been telling the guys the night before, 'Hey, you gotta try shrimp and grits. If you haven't been South, you gotta try it.' Well, the first booth at the street fair was Soby's selling shrimp and grits. So we had that for breakfast and just one thing after another."

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from the state, region, county and city had drawn up an itinerary designed to impress. It included lunch at Trio, cocktails at the Lazy Goat, dinner at Larkin's and a stroll through Falls Park and across the Liberty Bridge. The wives relaxed at a spa and took in a fashion show.

"There were a lot of people out downtown," said Hal Johnson, president of the Upstate Alliance, who joined the group for dinner. "The folks couldn't believe how clean it was, how friendly everyone was, how walkable the community was. I think it was a real deal sealer for them."

It wasn't long before Bradfield decided to move from Cleveland to downtown Greenville.

"We fell in love," he said.

Perceptis is building out the new location in the First Citizens Building on West McBee Street and so far has filled about 25 of at least 200 jobs it expects to create at the site.

Bradfield, 61, said he and his wife, Candace, are thinking about taking up residence downtown as well. They're in the process of moving from Cleveland and have been looking at real estate.

"We're grandparents now, so there's no one at home," he said. "It's the two of us and the cats you know."

Perceptis provides help desk and customer support services to colleges and universities, assisting students, parents, faculty and staff in such areas as e-mail, admissions, enrollment, benefits, payroll and financial aid. Clients include the University of Virginia, the University of Alabama and the Colorado community college system.

Bradfield, a former Bell Atlantic executive originally from Philadelphia, founded Perceptis in 2004. He expects it to double in size every year for the next three years.

Bradfield said Perceptis added a third call center to the two it operates in Cleveland and Phoenix to solve a "sales issue."

Because Perceptis allows call center agents to work from home, very few come into the main call center in Cleveland, he said. And that left a bad impression with some potential customers who toured the facility, Bradfield said.

"So you come to the headquarters call center in Cleveland and there's a couple of folks taking calls," he said. "It wasn't pretty."

Competitors had invested lots of money in really fancy call centers, so Perceptis decided to spend some on one as well, Bradfield said.

The money came from Frontier Capital, a private equity firm in Charlotte that is part of the South Carolina Venture Capital Authority program.

After investing $6 million in Perceptis, Frontier encouraged the company to look at locations in South Carolina.

"The Frontier guys said, 'Hey, why don't you take a look? There's lots of good places in South Carolina,'" Bradfield said. "They suggested Greenville, they suggested Charleston, they suggested Columbia. Take a look at the state is basically what they said."



Perceptis employee Tim Rose leads a training class at the company's new headquarters and call center located in the First Citizens building.

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