BUSINESS

QuikTrip plans 9 Upstate stores

Midwest convenience store chain has plans to expand in the region

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A fast-growing convenience store chain from Oklahoma is moving into the Upstate, bringing new jobs and new competition for operators already here.

Tulsa-based QuikTrip Corp. is obtaining permits to open its first nine stores in the Upstate and hopes to grow quickly in the region, said Mike Thornbrugh, its manager of public and government affairs.

He wouldn't say exactly how many stores QuikTrip plans to open in the Upstate over time.

"Obviously we have a plan internally, but we're not going to let our competition know that," Thornbrugh said.

So far, he said, QuikTrip has filed for permits to open two stores each in Spartanburg, Anderson and Mauldin and one store each in Boiling Springs, Piedmont and Greer.

The chain is "more interested in quality than quantity," Thornbrugh said, and will take the time necessary to find the right locations and employees.

The privately held QuikTrip operates 560 stores in nine states, and so far it's only East Coast market is Atlanta, where it has launched 119 stores since 1986.

Stewart Spinks, founder and chief executive of the Spinx Co., the Greenville-based convenience store chain with 72 outlets, said he thinks QuikTrip plans to enter the Charlotte market eventually and is in the Upstate "building the bridge between Atlanta and Charlotte."

The arrival of a company as big as QuikTrip is a testament to the Upstate's business climate, Spinks said.

"Of course it's not great for me, but competition makes you better, so we'll just have to get better," Spinks said.

Thornbrugh said QuikTrip has grown with its decision a few years ago to start serving fresh foods such as pastries and deli sandwiches.

A commissary/bakery the chain opened in Ellenwood, Ga., a year and a half ago to serve its Atlanta stores will also serve future stores in South Carolina's Interstate 85 corridor, he said.