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## Wireless firm coming to LR

### Hirers of up to 250 to look at Alltel vets

By [David Smith](#)

Wednesday, December 16, 2009

[Print item](#)

LITTLE ROCK — Allied Wireless Communications Corp. will locate its corporate headquarters in Little Rock, hiring up to 250 people at salaries high enough to attract many of Alltel Corp.'s former top employees, the company said Tuesday.

Allied Wireless is a new subsidiary of Atlantic Tele-Network Inc., a Salem, Mass., telecommunications firm. The subsidiary was formed after Atlantic Tele-Network agreed to pay Verizon Wireless \$200 million for rural wireless properties that were formerly owned by Alltel.

The properties in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Illinois, Ohio and Idaho have more than 800,000 former Alltel customers.

Allied Wireless did not disclose its average salary, but Gov. Mike Beebe hinted at it at a news conference at the state Capitol.

"The average salary will be greater than mine," said Beebe, who is paid about \$87,000 a year.

Allied Wireless, named for Alltel's predecessor, Allied Telephone, said its investment will go beyond the \$200 million purchase price of the wireless properties and include the renovation of its headquarters. The office will be on Technology Drive in west Little Rock, a former location for Acxiom Corp.

The state will give Allied Wireless \$5 million in incentives for equipment and training, as well as performance-based incentives based on the company's payroll, Beebe said.

#### BLOW SOFTENED

The announcement softens some of the blow of Verizon's \$28.1 billion acquisition of Alltel that closed in January. At least 1,000 Alltel jobs were expected eventually to be lost in that transition.



Frank O'Mara (left), chief executive officer of Allied Wireless, greets Warren Stephens on Tuesday at the state Capitol. Stephens' company played a role in Allied's choosing Little Rock, state officials said. Photo by **Staton Breidenthal**

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Verizon has a call center in Little Rock that will eventually employ about 1,200, but those jobs pay much less than the Alltel jobs that are being lost.

Tuesday's announcement was not completely unexpected.

Michael Prior, Atlantic Tele-Network's chief executive, told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette in August that his company would establish operations in Little Rock within a year or two.

"In the short term, nothing is written in stone, but we are highly likely to establish an office there," Prior said at the time. He said then that the company was aware of the talent available in Little Rock because of former Alltel employees there.

It wasn't a certainty, though, that the new subsidiary would be located in Little Rock, particularly because none of the former Alltel markets that Atlantic Tele-Network acquired are in Arkansas. Atlantic Tele-Network also considered putting the headquarters in Atlanta, where it already has offices.

Frank O'Mara, former chief marketing officer at Alltel, was chosen in October as the new company's chief executive officer, although it was called Atlantic Wireless Communications at the time instead of Allied Wireless.

Kathy Deck, director of the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, said: "What is fantastic is that Little Rock had this available labor force from Alltel. When you look at this company coming in and taking advantage of the skills that the labor force has and bringing in such high-paying jobs, it really is spectacular."

## STEPHENS CONNECTION

Neither the Arkansas Economic Development Commission nor the governor's office were familiar with Atlantic Tele-Network until executives at Stephens Inc., including owner Warren Stephens, informed them, Beebe said.

They told the state about Atlantic Tele-Network and advised the company about the potential that Little Rock as a headquarters offered because of the wealth of former Alltel employees, Beebe said.

"If it wasn't for Warren and his people, the initial opportunity to talk never would have happened," Beebe said.

And it was basically as a courtesy to Stephens that Atlantic Tele-Network executives came to Little Rock for the first visit, Beebe said.

Stephens' Kenny Gunderman, executive vice president and co-director of corporate finance, and Chad Crank, managing director and corporate finance associate, advised Atlantic Tele-Network about the possibility of buying some of the former properties soon after Verizon put them up for sale, Stephens said. When Atlantic Tele-Network made the purchase, Gunderman and Crank told state and local officials about the potential of landing a corporate headquarters, Stephens said.

Stephens said, "Of course, we wanted them to locate here, but you never know if they're going to or not."

The Circumference Group, a private investing and advisory firm based in Little Rock that focuses on technology and telecommunications businesses, also has consulted with Atlantic Tele-Network for months. The Circumference Group is made up of about a dozen former Alltel executives.

O'Mara worked at the Circumference Group after Alltel was sold to Verizon. Jeff Fox, Alltel's former chief operating officer and now chief executive officer and partner with the Circumference Group, called O'Mara a great choice to lead Allied Wireless.

"The Atlantic Tele-Network people did a great job being entrepreneurial and buying this [former Alltel wireless] business," Fox said. "It is a very natural fit for them to get help from some of these very experienced [Alltel] people."

The more that Allied Wireless saw of the talent pool in Little Rock, the more the company liked the idea of locating here, Prior said Tuesday.

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Allied Wireless initially will follow the strategies that Alltel used in dealing with the 800,000 former Alltel customers, Prior said. Allied Wireless will continue using the Alltel brand for as long as it can, O'Mara said.

"[Alltel] did a very good job of being competitive in their markets," Prior said. "Over time, we'll have to be creative to remain competitive."

O'Mara said Allied Wireless will consider former Alltel employees and others interested in applying in an attempt "to put the band back together to an extent."

"Our intention is to start with Arkansas folks," O'Mara said about hiring priorities. "Over the course of the next six to 12 months, there should be a lot of folks becoming available from Verizon who we are obviously very interested in, and they are very interested in us. We want a long-term future in the wireless industry."

The opportunity to apply for a job with Allied Wireless, is available at [www.awcc.com](http://www.awcc.com). In addition to O'Mara, Allied Wireless already has hired three other former Alltel executives - Wade McGill as chief administrative officer, Lewis Langston as chief information officer and C.J. Duvall as vice president of human resources.

Front Section, Pages 1 on 12/16/2009

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