

Asheville lures climate firm

SRC's relocation may add dozens of new jobs

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BENT CREEK — A scientific research company has opened a new office in Asheville to take advantage of the climate know-how at the National Climatic Data Center, with hopes of bringing millions of dollars in federal contracts to the city.

Scientific Research Corp., headquartered in Atlanta, is a 1,200-employee company that provides information and communication systems for the

Department of Defense, other federal agencies and the private sector. The Asheville office, located at the Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College Enka campus, will translate long-range climate data into information that planners could use at the local level.

The announcement, made Thursday at the N.C. Arboretum, came after months of careful courting by Asheville leaders involved with Centers for Environmental and Climate Interaction. CECI, which was spun off from the Hub Alliance, is a non-profit partnership working to attract weather-related businesses to the region.

"We do expect a substantial federal investment in climate research," said Greg Wilson, who will head the Asheville office. "Climate change is a global problem that we will have to try to localize, whether the information is needed in Asheville or around the world."

Wilson moved to Asheville in 2003, bringing the Baron Advanced Meteorological Services company to take advantage of NCDC data. He previously had worked 22 years with NASA, directing the agency's Earth Observing System.

The local SRC office, part of the company's Earth Science Group, will

have five researchers at first, but that's an advance guard to what could be dozens of new jobs, according to the company's Dave Bennett.

Bennett expects the company to add more workers as it pursues federal contracts, and other companies could follow SRC to Asheville to participate in research projects.

"This is a real home run," said George Briggs, executive director of the N.C. Arboretum and the head of CECI. "This is not just a company we've attracted, but an anchor, a partner who can help us build this whole sector."

"We've been working for a long time to bring a more

significant federal presence in Asheville," said Max Lennon, president of the economic development group Education Research Services. "We need a world-class team in order to compete in this complex field."

"The presence of NOAA's National Climatic Data Center and CECI were both key in our decision to locate our new operation in Asheville," said Joe Durham, senior vice president of SRC. "CECI's leadership reached out and helped us see that Asheville has unique strengths in this arena and that opportunities exist in the work related to climate information and services."