

Solstas, Ralph Lauren offer back-to-back punch *City takes pride in economic milestones*

*By Paul Johnson
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Solstas CEO David Weavil addresses the crowd during last week's announcement at the High Point Municipal Building as NC Gov. Bev Perdue (seated, center) listens.

HIGH POINT – Talk about economic fortune with unexpected timing.

As the nation and community try to emerge from the stranglehold of the Great Recession, the city of High Point is marking an encouraging milestone. During a little more than the past year, city economic recruiters have landed the largest-single job announcements by a single High Point employer in at least 13 years.

Last week, Solstas Lab Partners announced it would add 500 jobs during a five-year period at its medical and diagnostic laboratories operation in north High Point. Solstas already is one of the city's largest employers, with 720 full-time and 140 part-time employees.

The Solstas expansion follows last year's growth of Ralph Lauren Corp., which is adding 400 jobs in the city. Ralph Lauren, also one of the city's largest employers, boosted its work force through its third major distribution and logistics operation in High Point.

When both companies complete their employment expansions, that alone would have a positive effect of lowering the city's jobless rate by half a percentage point, said Ikel Williams, manager of the High Point office of the N.C. Division of Employment Security.

"They are going to have a major effect when they get completely up," Williams said.

The Solstas and Ralph Lauren expansions are the single-largest job announcements by an employer in High Point dating back to the late 1990s, which was a period of rapid economic expansion across the country and Triad.

"Fourteen months apart, we have announced the two largest job-creation projects in High Point in the last 13 years: the December 2010 announcement by Ralph Lauren Corp. of its 400-job project and this week's 500-job announcement by Solstas Lab Partners," said Loren Hill, president of the High Point Economic Development Corp.

Hill said his economic recruitment office's client activity level remains high, "and we are hopeful many of those prospects become additional job-creation announcements."

The news of expansions such as Solstas and Ralph Lauren provide encouragement to job-seekers who still contend with a challenging labor market, Williams said.

"It is good motivator that there is something positive and opportunities out there," Williams said.