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Wichita State's cybersecurity program helps Novacoast locate office in Wichita

By Paul Suellentrop



Wichita State is part of Wichita's growing cybersecurity infrastructure. In December, the Kansas Board of Regents approved the creation of the School of Computing at Wichita State's College of Engineering.

- Novacoast, headquartered in California, plans to open a security operations center in downtown Wichita.
- Wichita State's computer science programs and cybersecurity expertise played an important role in attracting the company to Wichita.
- Wichita State is adding a School of Computing to its College of Engineering.

Novacoast, a California-based cybersecurity company, looks for a university and a talent pipeline in a livable city when it plans expansion.

Over our 24 years, we've always been tied to a university," said Paul Anderson, Novacoast's chief executive officer. "A lot of what we hire for is grit. The combination of that Kansas, Wichita culture that you guys have — combined with that subset of people who have a passion for learning — that's just an amazing combination."

Late in 2020, Anderson visited Wichita in search of a place to open an office, prompted in part when the COVID-19 pandemic exposed a need to diversify geographically. Wichita State University and WSU Tech's computer and cybersecurity offerings played an important role in Novacoast's decision.

In February, Novacoast announced plans to open a 24/7 security operations center in the Epic Center in downtown Wichita. Novacoast, according to media reports, will hire around 60 employees immediately for positions such as sales, analysts and cybersecurity engineers.

"Having a robust computer science department and applied computing department is a good source of interns and future employees to Novacoast," said Joe Jabara, director of Wichita State's Hub for Cybersecurity Education and Awareness. "The university's emphasis on cybersecurity really helped lure them to Wichita."

Anderson's visits to Wichita convinced him that the combination of educational resources and city amenities could work as it does for Novacoast's locations in cities such as Santa Barbara, California (its headquarters), Los Angeles, Dallas and Ann Arbor, Mich. Novacoast's other locations are connected to universities such as University of California-Santa Barbara, UCLA, University of Michigan and University of Manchester in Manchester, England.

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*— Paul Anderson, chief executive officer,
Novacoast*

"We have to find an area where people get educated in and they won't want to leave," Anderson said. "Finding Wichita, where person after person I met with said, 'We love it here. We don't want to leave' — that's perfect for us. We want these people to build careers with us."

Novacoast executives met with Wichita State and WSU Tech officials and toured the campuses. Anderson also attended a mixer with local Information Technology companies and left impressed with the friendliness and willingness to help a potential competitor.

“It’s a very unique culture that you guys have there,” he said. “In Wichita, they all want to help and partner.”

Wichita State is part of Wichita’s growing cybersecurity infrastructure.

The university began increasing its computer science and cybersecurity programs under former president John Bardo. In December, the Kansas Board of Regents approved the creation of the School of Computing at Wichita State’s College of Engineering.

“The computer science program is impressive, and it definitely resonated with us,” Anderson said. “Wichita State is positioning itself to be a go-to hiring pool for any companies that are looking for computer science majors, and that’s an industry that’s not going away in our lifetime.”

The Kansas Air National Guard 184th Wing Cyberspace Operations Group, located at McConnell Air Force Base, is an important source of expertise and talent. In 2019, the National Security Agency and the Department of Homeland Security designated Wichita State as a [National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education](#).

“We established cybersecurity as a real focus and area we wanted to grow,” said Dr. Jan Twomey, coordinator of the Wichita State Hub for Cyber Security Education and Awareness. “We have several programs in cybersecurity which we think can help train new staff, new professionals, for them.”

Greater Wichita Partnership contacted Novacoast through a strategic business outreach campaign targeted at cybersecurity firms. It pitched and promoted Wichita’s cybersecurity and computer education programs, cost of living, regulatory freedom and the talent pipeline.

“The company visited Wichita three times before the official announcement, and every visit we were able to promote the cybersecurity assets and advantages our community provides,” said Adrienne Korson, director of economic development at Greater Wichita Partnership. “Every trip, the potential they saw in Wichita kept growing.”

The cybersecurity infrastructure that lured Novacoast to Wichita can work for other companies, Twomey said. Wichita State’s Innovation Campus provides a model.

“We do so much work with industry, unlike a lot of campuses, so we’re already used to working with industries, servicing their needs,” she said. “It’s in our blood to do these kinds of things.”