

Apple, Google, Facebook turn N.C. into data center hub

Cloud computing growth is bringing big benefits to small towns in western North Carolina.

Patrick Thibodeau

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Apple's new \$1 billion dollar data center looms large on Google Earth, putting its Maiden, N.C., home on the map. From the roof to its sides, the 500,000-square-foot building is painted white to reflect the sun's heat back into space.

It would be unfair to call Maiden, population 3,409, an unlikely place for a new data center.

Large cloud providers are building monolithic facilities in areas that offer relatively [low-cost land](#) as well as abundant and somewhat [inexpensive electricity](#).

Western North Carolina, where Maiden is located, fits such a bill.

[Google has already built](#) a \$600 million data center in Lenoir, N.C., less than an hour's drive from Maiden. And Facebook is building a \$450 million, 300,000 square foot data center in Forrest City, N.C., just over an hour way.

When Google announced plans for its North Carolina data center in 2007, Scott Millar, president of the Catawba County Economic Development Corp., was hopeful that the decision would draw the curiosity and interest of other tech firms.

Now, Millar said, "I think the dynamics that brought Google are still in place for others." The addition of an Apple data center has only increased interest in the area, he noted.

"Having the Apple brand in our community says to a lot of folks that if Apple's investing here, then we can invest here," said Millar.

It also has intangible benefits, particularly among young people who see the Apple logo and think, "Maybe there is a future for me here," he said.

The region is appealing to data centers partly because it has a good electric grid. There's a long legacy of furniture and textile manufacturing, both power-intensive industries.

Tax breaks help as well. Apple has received 10-year 50% break in real estate taxes and an



85% break in personal property taxes. The economic development effort also includes fast turnaround on permits, and for Apple, a building inspector was stationed on-site to help speed construction, said Millar.

Apple also has room to expand. Its facility is located on some 200 acres, and it is occupying only a small part of the site for now, said Millar.

Apple "brought us national attention as a player in the tech world," said Todd Hermes, Maiden's town manager.

Apple's data center turned up on Google Earth just recently, something [Fortune](#) may have been the first to report. But Hermes said there are plenty of large buildings in the area, including an industrial park three miles south with 12 buildings of similar size. The area also has furniture, paper products and textile manufacturing facilities, he said.

Apple's data center is creating about 50 direct jobs and 250 indirect jobs, such as contractors who will work on the site. The construction work created 2,500 to 3,000 jobs.

Hermes said he isn't expecting Apple to change the fundamental, Mayberry-type nature of the town, a place where everybody knows one another.

The town is planning to buy some iPads for next year, and it has some Apple computers as well, but Dell machines and BlackBerries are also in use. Hermes uses an iPhone, "but I've always used an iPhone," he noted.



New Apple data center in Maiden, N.C. (Image: GoogleEarth)

Patrick Thibodeau covers SaaS and enterprise applications, outsourcing, government IT policies, data centers and IT workforce issues for Computerworld. Follow Patrick on Twitter at [@DCgov](#), or subscribe to [Patrick's RSS feed](#). His e-mail address is pthibodeau@computerworld.com.