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**Renovating The Mountain State**

In recent years, WVU’s Statler College of Engineering and Mineral Resources has been receiving universal praise for its engineering programs. Notably, those involved with the robotics teams have been globally recognized for their success in competitions like the NASA Sample Return Robot Challenge (Wvustatler). This, among other recognitions, has in turn put a spotlight on engineers coming out of West Virginia. Demand is high all around, yet the state in which these people are being educated is reaping so little of the benefits of these programs. A myriad of factors has led to this situation. However, when one thinks critically, solutions to these circumstances present themselves.

To understand the solutions, the problems must first be identified. West Virginia has been losing not only its engineering population, but also many of the younger population in general because so many do not find much opportunity in the state. This lack of prospect can be attributed to two issues that plague the state: economic troubles and the opioid epidemic. Along with this, West Virginia is lacking in possessing a variety of engineering companies. For a large part of the state, most engineers belong to different civil engineering firms, and have acquired years of experience under their belt, thereby lessening any demand for any new ones (Home). Factors like these tend to be why companies do not wish to branch out into West Virginia.

Though the disadvantages of bringing a company to West Virginia can make it seem like a risky move, there are several examples of large companies benefiting greatly from residing in the state. In a seemingly unheard-of circumstance for the state, settled in the town of Rocket Center, WV, lies several different satellite locations home to the operations of several multi-
billion-dollar companies. Most notable, Orbital ATK acts as one of the largest employers in the Mineral County area, providing careers over a thousand people throughout the area (ABL by the Numbers). Due to their grand success, the company was bought out in late 2017 for $9.2 billion by Northrop Grumman, one of the largest engineering firms in the world (Northrop Grumman).

It is clear that despite what many studies say about the state, large companies can succeed. Though companies can see the clear success of companies such as Orbital ATK, what incentive is there to move to the state? From a strictly business standpoint, there are plenty. For a large company with operations going on all over, proximity matters. Morgantown, WV, is within a 500-mile radius of many large cities spread throughout the east coast of the US including Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, New York City, and Atlanta (Free Map Tools). This means that large companies can effectively run operations in relatively nearby vicinities. West Virginia also serves as the better location corporate-tax-wise. West Virginia’s corporate tax is 6.5 percent, which is much more appealing for large businesses when compared to nearby state Maryland’s rate of 8.25 percent (Tax Policy in West Virginia; Taxes).

With all of these points, what could possibly motivate companies to invest in West Virginia if they have not already? Simply put, it is a marketing issue. To many, the state lacks in cultural aspects of life like modern restaurant trends, technology, and fast internet. The Mountain State is living in the past, and the only way to overcome these inhibitions would be to give West Virginia an upgrade, and then market the state as the ideal location for an engineering company. The government would need to start working out a plan for a sort of “corporate tourism,” renovating the state so that it may fit the technological wants and needs of the many engineering giants in the modern world. The process would involve implementing a whole lot of little things that are common in larger metropolitan areas that are not common throughout West Virginia.
Quicker internet, water-bottle fountains, and simply more places to go on the weekend are all little things that when stacked together greatly benefit the socio-economic factors of the state. Among other things, such a project would greatly benefit the state’s crippling infrastructure. As for the marketing portion, the Statler College is the ideal institution to perform this task. Instead of engineers leaving West Virginia for large companies, large companies come to West Virginia to seek employment from the talented skill graduating in the state. The Statler College breeds some of the best engineers in the country. Numerous institutions rank the programs in the top 10 percent of engineering schools by value in the US (Wvustatler). However, when it comes down to it, a degree is a degree, no matter where it is obtained. WVU is unique in that the people it produces carry a strong and prideful reputation with them wherever they go, which is beneficial in any workplace. By showing the talent and prowess of its students, many companies would become interested in investing in West Virginia and its engineers. Once one company starts to see success, trickle-down-economics will take into effect and the process will begin to snowball due to competition among different companies seeking to utilize the cost-effective talent brought before them.

In conclusion, the solution to West Virginia’s problem of engineers leaving the state can be quite easily fixed. The assumption that West Virginia is bad for business can be easily debunked when one looks at the successes of companies like Orbital ATK. Simply put, the state is in need of a makeover to make itself seem appealing to investors. Cities like Charleston and Morgantown can both serve as hubs for engineering companies, but such a project would have to span throughout the entire state in order to be successful. With the success of this project, no longer would engineers be leaving the state in droves, but other places in the country would be competing to secure a job in West Virginia.
Works Cited


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