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Parata has big hiring plans

By JEAN P. FISHER, Staff Writer

Brisk demand for Parata Systems' robotic pharmacy dispensing units is prompting the Durham company to establish an in-house service team to maintain the machines, creating about 75 new jobs by year end.

By the end of 2005, Parata expects to have at least 2,000 of its machines installed in drugstores in the United States and Canada. The privately held company introduced its dispensing units, which can automatically dispense, cap, label and alphabetically sort 240 prescriptions an hour, at an industry trade show in August 2003.

"We are starting to experience significant growth, and we thought we needed to establish a one-on-one relationship with our customers," said Charles Lelly, Parata's vice president of product services.

The company, which takes its name from the Latin word for "prepare," will hire workers to staff a customer-service call center; field technicians to service its units; trainers to teach customers to use the machines and staff to handle planning and installation at customer locations.

Some jobs, such as trainers and field technicians, will be scattered through the country. Lelly said about half the positions will be filled locally. The new hires would push the total work force to nearly 150.

In creating its own service and support department, Parata chose to end its relationship with the photo-finishing equipment service company Qualex/Kodak Service and Support, which had been servicing Parata's dispensing machines in drugstores. Lelly, a former president of Qualex, said the companies parted ways amicably.

"We want to feel the pulse of the business," Lelly said. "The best way to do that is to be in front of your customers every day."

Parata's leaders hope service technicians will be able to bring back valuable information from customers, including any blips in the technology they experience, or new capabilities and functions they would like to see.

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File Photo by Harry Lynch

The robot arm of a Parata machine drops a just-filled prescription into the proper alphabetical tray.