A bigger share of the wireless pie

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A bigger share of the wireless pie

Austin has big aspirations in the wireless IC sector, making a concerted effort to become another San Diego. Austin's mayor, Will Wynn, was on TV the other night, hanging out at Austin-Bergstrom airport and talking about wireless connectivity.

Austin's city fathers see wireless as the growth area that can offset the seemingly inexorable decline in chip manufacturing there. Had Austin been more proactive five years ago, AMD and Motorola might have kept their new fabs and process development centers there, instead of in Dresden, Germany, and Crolles, France.

Austin already fashions itself as a center for microprocessor design, led by AMD, IBM and Freescale Semiconductor. Can wireless match MPUs in Austin's pantheon?

To that end, the University of Texas at Austin lured Ted Rappaport from Virginia to head the wireless networking and communications group. He is bringing engineers together for wireless seminars and is inviting other academics to teach there.

Alereon, a promising startup in the ultrawideband (UWB) space, split off from Time Domain and relocated to Austin last year, bringing dozens of engineers from Huntsville, Ala. Alereon recently attracted Jim Lansford to move there from Oklahoma to assume the role of CTO.

Bandspeed is working the wireless-LAN space, developing spatial-division multiple-access components to sell to access point vendors. Bandspeed's CTO, Stan Skafidas, is moving from Australia to Austin late this year.

And while we're talking about moving, the Wi-Fi Alliance, a worldwide certification body for wireless products, is moving from Mountain View, Calif., to Austin, said Frank Hanzlik, its managing director.

With Dell as a big Wi-Fi customer that is looking at UWB for a variety of its products, Austin has a systems company to provide inputs to the chip companies here.

Probably the biggest question in the wireless space concerns Freescale Semiconductor, which makes about one-fifth of its revenue from wireless chips. Freescale now expects its initial public offering to come in June. After the IPO, it will be interesting to see what happens to its UWB effort.

I'll truly believe in Austin's Wi-Fi credentials, however, when the city installs wireless connectivity at the Austin Convention Center.

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