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# Solid growth spurt

## New-business openings up 12.5% over 2004

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Wisconsin is on track to have another strong year for new-business starts.

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If the current rate of business openings continues, this will be the fourth straight year of double-digit growth. So far this year, 20,341 new companies have registered with the state, a rate that's 12.5% ahead of last year.

### New Business Growth in State

**ENTREPRENEURS NEW BUSINESS GROWTH**  
 Wisconsin is on pace for a double-digit increase in the number of new businesses registered for the fourth consecutive year.

Source: Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions | Journal Sentinel  
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Some are high-tech companies spawned by professors and

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proximity to the state's universities, but many more are in the traditional business categories of services, retail and manufacturing.

There's more seed money available from lenders and investors, and a growing state economy translates to a demand for more suppliers. And business leaders say that aging baby boomers are concluding it's now or never to run ventures of their own.

Antonina Larson of Milwaukee said she started selling air purification equipment as Country Fresh Air from home after it helped her with her own allergy problems.

Software engineer Scott Marose said he started Fox Valley Sign Source in Appleton - a part-time venture so far - because he always wanted to run his own business. He said he already is



making money at it but learned quickly what many entrepreneurs find out.

"It's been more competitive than I anticipated," Marose said.

Karin Gale, an accountant and consultant with Schenck Business Solutions in Milwaukee, said she hasn't seen any particular trend in the kinds of new companies. "It's a little bit of everything," she said.

She said the growth in entrepreneurship may be fueled in part by baby boomers who realize time is running out if they ever are going to start a business.

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"My sense is it's sometimes related to where people are at in their career and wanting to go out on their own and do something where they have control," Gale said.

Credit is more available to business owners today than a few years ago, said Paul Smith, a partner in the Milwaukee office of the accounting and consulting firm Wipfli. But he said it seems like Madison, Green Bay and the Fox Valley are getting more start-ups than Milwaukee.

"My perception is I haven't seen a lot of significant increase in the southeastern Wisconsin area," Smith said.

Gov. Jim Doyle has pushed programs aimed at improving the atmosphere for entrepreneurs of all types, said Tony Hozeny, spokesman for the state's Department of Commerce.

"One of the main issues has been specialized support for high-growth businesses that are creating new products and processes, and hence, will ultimately create high-paying jobs," Hozeny said.

He pointed, for example, to new tax credits for individuals or funds investing in small Wisconsin technology start-ups and to grants and loans for early-stage companies.

Jim Andreucci, director of the Wisconsin Entrepreneur of the Year program for the accounting firm Ernst & Young, credited the state government's business incubator and entrepreneurial support programs with improving the business climate, especially for technology firms.

"The support of the Wisconsin government and the economy going well are probably the key reasons I would see for companies that are at the young stages incorporating here in Wisconsin," Andreucci said.

Earlier this year, stem cell research pioneer James Thomson started a drug-screening company - Cellular Dynamics International, or CDI - with two other University of Wisconsin-Madison faculty members. The company hopes eventually to test drugs using human heart cells derived from embryonic stem cells.

Trevor Twose, chief executive of a Fitchburg company that is developing drugs to treat Alzheimer's disease, said Wisconsin is an increasingly attractive venue for biomedical research companies.

"The engine that drives it all is the University of Wisconsin," said Twose, whose company, Mithridion Inc., recently won \$80,000 worth of free office space in University Research Park in Madison and \$20,000 in cash as the top finisher in the Governor's Business Plan Contest.

Jim Pugh, spokesman for the state's biggest trade group, Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce, said the seemingly friendlier climate for business in Wisconsin is in jeopardy because of "terrible Supreme Court rulings that are going to make businesses sitting ducks for

trial lawyers."

Three state Supreme Court rulings of concern:

- A July decision that struck down caps on awards to victims of medical malpractice for pain and suffering damages.
- A July ruling that a Milwaukee teenager with lead poisoning may pursue a lawsuit against a number of companies that made and sold lead paint, although attorneys couldn't identify which firm is responsible for his injuries.
- A March decision that overturned a lower court ruling in a case related to the 1999 Big Blue crane collapse at Miller Park. The high court reinstated a \$94 million award to the families of three ironworkers who were killed in the accident.

"The big, dark cloud on the horizon is the hostile litigation environment," Pugh said. "We are hoping the legislature and the governor are going to work to fix that."

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