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Skolkovo Sizzles as 100th Company Joins

By Irina Filatova

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It was hot in Moscow's Gorky Park on Thursday, but not just because of the sweltering temperatures. A crowd of entrepreneurs stood roused to fever pitch as the management of the Skolkovo Foundation selected who would be formally deemed the 100th resident from among 31 new participants of the innovation hub.

The prize for the lucky winner was a certificate for a Silicon Valley internship for two. Representatives of all firms that were in the lottery were optimistic, saying Skolkovo provides good opportunities for business development.

"We expect our tax load, particularly social security payments, to decline starting next month," said Sergei Gudyrin, executive director of Agent Plus, which won the coveted No. 100. His company joined Skolkovo's information technology cluster.

Agent Plus, which is headquartered in Astrakhan in southern Russia and has an office

in Moscow, develops software for portable devices used by mobile office workers.

Skolkovo residents get a number of benefits, among them tax breaks, including on social security payments. This is especially important for Agent Plus because salaries account for the lion's share of its expenditures, Gudyrin said in an interview.

Another advantage in joining Skolkovo is the chance to make professional contacts, Gudyrin said.

Participating in Skolkovo provides an opportunity to meet like-minded people, agreed Vasily Shelkov, chief executive of Rock Flow Dynamics, another software firm.

"We want to be in the right company," he told The Moscow Times.

Rock Flow Dynamics, which develops software to visualize oil and gas fields and forecast their dynamics, partners with TNK-BP, Rosneft, LUKoil and Gazprom-Neft.

The Moscow-based company, which also joined Skolkovo's IT cluster, already got $2 million from Intel last year. So far it's spent half the sum opening an office in Houston.

The company is also counting on a grant from Skolkovo that it would use to further expand its business, mainly in the Middle East, Shelkov said.

"If we get Skolkovo's support, it will take us a couple of years to progress in this direction," he said.

Most new residents joined the biomedical and IT clusters, while several were added to the nuclear and energy clusters.

The new additions include companies working on drugs for cancer and rheumatoid arthritis, creating software to help track and investigate cyber crimes, and developing speech recognition systems.

Skolkovo Foundation's president Viktor Vekselberg, who gave a speech to the newcomers, said attracting 100 residents "marks a certain stage for the project's implementation."

"Few thought that we'd have 100 companies in less than a year," he said, adding that the growing number of residents indicates that Russia has a potential for innovation.

Among the big international names that joined Skolkovo earlier are Siemens, Bosch and Nokia. But some other technology companies, such as HP, remain reluctant to participate.

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