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Chandler firm will hire 100 people after \$10 million deal with Sweden

By ANGELA GONZALES

Safko International Inc., a small, Chandler-based manufacturer of computer systems for the physically disabled, expects to hire 100 new employees in the Valley once it signs an agreement to provide 20,000 computer systems to the Swedish government.

The socialist Swedish government has earmarked \$500 million to help the

physically disabled regain employment, says Lon S. Safko, president and founder of privately held Safko International.

Of that \$500 million, Safko expects initially to sell \$10 million worth of computer equipment to the European country.

"They will buy," he says. "The indi-

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Skipp, a quadriplegic, can control his bed, radio and television set with the use of his computer setup.

Swedish pact should yield \$10 million, 100 new jobs for company

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cation is, they want our product. I'm real excited about this possibility."

He plans to sign the agreement with the Swedish government soon. "I'm shooting for at least signing a preliminary contract by Sept. 1," he says.

The agreement should be a major shot in the arm for Safko International, which employs only seven people now. After breaking even since the company's inception in 1986, the small manufacturer hopes to expand greatly and use the Swedish deal as a springboard for growth.

Once the purchase order for equipment is made, Safko says, he will need at least 100 people to manufacture and market the product.

The company's manufacturing plant is in Washington state, but also will be

tration, sales and marketing, and hardware and software engineering departments.

The 100 people Safko hopes to hire would be a combination of skilled and unskilled labor, including accounting, sales, marketing and technical personnel.

"I would drain DeVry [Institute] or Arizona State University as soon as I sign this," he says.

Safko says he never intended to market his product in other countries. But he adds that socialist governments are ahead of the game when it comes to providing funding for programs for their citizens. On the other hand, he says, "the American government is only beginning to realize the vast human resources available and is passing laws to tap that resource."

qualified candidates away because of a physical disability, no matter how severe the disability.

Steady growth has been the hallmark of the company since it was founded in 1986. The first year, Safko's goal was to break even. This year he aspires to sell only 12 more of his company's computer systems, which are called SenSei, from the Japanese term of dignity meaning "master" or "teacher."

But he plans to sell 100 systems next year, then 500 the following year.

Within three years, Safko says, he hopes to sell a minimum of 1,000 systems a year. The system is based on the Apple Macintosh computer line and is designed to assist people with physical disabilities in performing tasks that had previously

phone or operate such devices as televisions and videocassette recorders. It also has capabilities for producing professional documents using word processing and graphics.

Quadriplegics can control their environments by pointing a head-mounted mouse input device and blowing into a small tube when the desired picture on the screen is identified. To turn on a lamp, for example, a user points to a picture of a lamp on the screen and puffs air into the tube to activate the light.

The onscreen keyboard allows even those with the most severe hand or arm disabilities to be productive, Safko says. Quadriplegics who have tested the product have been able to type up to 44 words per minute.