
City is lone Texas finalist for wind-turbine manufacturing plant

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San Angelo is set to make a "very strong offer" to entice one of Europe's largest construction companies to build its first North American wind-turbine manufacturing plant here, officials said Saturday.

The incentives offer, to be voted on Tuesday by the City of San Angelo Development Corp. and the City Council, comes after months of negotiations with the Portugal-based Martifer Group, which has named San Angelo one of three cities - and the lone Texas finalist - it is considering.

"It's a great company," said COSADC business liaison Kathy Keane. "It would be a great opportunity for San Angelo, and we're very optimistic."

Martifer Group is a holding company for four separate firms, with Martifer Energy Systems, founded in 2004, looking to expand into North America. The company manufactures wind turbines and wants to join the fast-growing American market, Keane said.

The company, which has construction plants in Portugal, Spain and Poland, has looked at cities in West Texas, California, New Mexico, Minnesota and Mexico, said Pat Malloy, San Angelo Chamber of Commerce vice president for economic development.

Martifer viewed Tom Green County as one of about seven in Texas it saw as potential building sites when it started its selection process in November, Malloy said. Since then, officials with the company have visited the area several times as negotiations have progressed, heating up over the past two months.

"That's a pretty good sign when you're at this stage," Malloy said, but he added: "It's always a little tenuous. There's a whole host of potential issues."

Martifer in 2007 reported net earnings of 12.6 million euros on revenues of 518.5 million euros. In current U.S. dollars, that would be net earnings of \$19.6 million on revenues of \$806.4 million.

Attracting Martifer would be a huge boon for a city whose recent history with manufacturing jobs has - like much of the country - been a sad one.

The probable capital investment brought by Martifer would be the most since Safe Car Inc. - which produced armor for vehicles - moved to San Angelo in 1991, Malloy said. That company closed in 1997, a year before the city received word from Martin Sprocket and Gear that it would expand here. It never did.

"When you look at the type of jobs that are hardest to attract," Assistant City Manager Elizabeth Grindstaff said, "manufacturing is something that's all but left us."

Martifer likely would within four years become one of San Angelo's 20 largest employers, on a level with Conner

Steel Products Inc. and West Texas Medical Associates.

Perhaps more important is the promise provided by attracting the city's first significant wind-energy company.

Additional industry-related suppliers and services would be likely to follow.

"I would not consider it a done deal," Keane said, "but I would say things are looking very promising for San Angelo."