
\$40M turbine plant coming

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The Martifer Group, a Portugal-based global construction company, will build a \$40 million wind-turbine tower manufacturing plant here, Gov. Rick Perry announced Monday.

The project brings the first significant influx of well-paying specialized manufacturing jobs to the Concho Valley in more than 20 years -- and recasts San Angelo as a regional hub for the burgeoning wind-energy industry.

"We have a good feeling about the people here," Martifer Energy Systems CEO Antonio Pontes said.

"We expect to have San Angelo as a very important city in Martifer's plans and Martifer's future."

Attracting Martifer comes at a significant price -- more than \$8 million in city, county and state incentives and abatements, with potentially \$15 million more in rail improvements still to be negotiated between the state and the Texas Pacifico Railroad.

It's a small price, economic development officials say, for the 225 jobs Martifer will bring in the next three years, the \$40 million in capital it will spend to bring its plant on line, and the hundreds of additional jobs likely to follow as affiliated wind-energy companies join it in San Angelo.

Perry's announcement -- made because a \$945,000 grant from the Texas Enterprise Fund was the final piece needed for the deal to come together -- formalized what was perhaps the worst-kept secret in the city. When the City Council approved its largest incentives package for any single company in June, it was widely thought to be the sole remaining formality needed for Martifer to choose San Angelo.

After deciding to expand across the Atlantic Ocean, Martifer Energy Systems started its selection process by studying wind maps of North America and quickly focused on Texas as a prime potential location, said Pedro Dinis, who will run the plant as country manager, overseeing all future American operations from San Angelo.

Martifer sent e-mails to hundreds of development corporations in Texas and other states. San Angelo replied swiftly, and remained on the list thanks to its highway access, rail access, an available work force and its proximity to the fast-growing wind fields that have been planted across West Texas, Dinis said.

Ultimately, Martifer chose San Angelo over a location in Mexico despite that city's advantages in labor cost, Pontes said.

In return, San Angelo has offered \$5.6 million in incentives and tax abatements, Tom Green County has offered an additional \$2 million in abatements, while the state -- in addition to its enterprise investment -- is negotiating millions of dollars in rail improvements with the Texas Pacifico Railroad, state Rep. Drew Darby said.

The rail line, which runs from near Coleman to the Mexico border along U.S. 67, is badly in need of repair, and a

truss bridge over the Colorado River in Ballinger is too narrow to accommodate the massive turbine pieces Martifer will need to ship.

Darby said he will seek \$3.5 million to replace the bridge when the Legislature convenes in January, while the Texas Department of Transportation has agreed to spend \$200,000 on the environmental study that must precede any work over the river.

Already, Martifer has been discussing San Angelo with its industry partners -- other wind-related energy companies who do business with Martifer and expand as the larger company expands. A representative of one such partner, for example, was in the audience Monday, Pontes said.