

Area makes cut for plant site

FutureGen search pared to four, including Mattoon and Tuscola

By **HERB MEEKER** and **KRISTA LEWIN**
H&R Staff Writers

MATTOON — Mattoon Mayor Charlie White couldn't be in two places at once Tuesday morning as officials heard that the city qualified as a finalist for the FutureGen power plant at the same time the local Illinois Army National Guard unit was leaving for its mission to Iraq.

Inadvertently leaving his cell phone at city hall, White was uncharacteristically out of the loop when the announcement was Webcast live to other city officials and residents while he was at the Maj. Gen. John Phipps National Guard Armory across town.

Mattoon, Tuscola, Odessa, Texas, and a site named "The Heart of Brazos" near Jewett, Texas, made the cut Tuesday as finalists for the \$1 billion project to build and operate the "cleanest power plant in the world." The electrical plant fueled by coal will be operational by 2012, according to the FutureGen Alliance that has partnered with the U.S. Department of

Energy for developing new uses of fossil fuels.

"It made me real happy to see such a turnout at the armory for the National Guard. Then Andy Adair brought over his cell phone, and I found out we made it. That made me feel real great, too."

■ Not the end

Effingham and Marshall officials disappointed, but upbeat over being dropped from consideration.

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and 150 or more plant jobs for decades, as well as other jobs related to the energy industry.

Mattoon also joined with Charleston to submit a plan for using their wastewater treatment plants to meet the 3.6 million gallons of water per day needed for the energy plant.

"This is the biggest economic news in the history of Mattoon," the 73-year-old retired banker said. "You couldn't buy as much press coverage as we've got today. They know where Mattoon

The city is still in the running for a prototype energy plant that will put it on the map economically and produce about 1,500 construction jobs in the next few years



Associated Press

City Commissioners Randy Ervin, left, Dave Schilling, center, and Joe McKenzie celebrate Tuesday in Mattoon City Hall after receiving the news that Mattoon is one of four finalists in the selection process for a \$1 billion prototype FutureGen plant.

Officials say Illinois has just what FutureGen needs

By **KURT ERICKSON**
H&R Springfield Bureau Chief

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois could have an advantage over Texas in the sweepstakes to land a \$1 billion, nearly pollution-free power plant, says the chief of the state's coal association.

Phil Gonet, director of the Illinois Coal Association, said Illinois' abundant coal fields

could give two sites in Illinois the leg up over two sites in Texas in the contest to land the FutureGen power plant project.

"We certainly have more coal than Texas, so that's good," said Gonet. "If coal supplies mean anything, we could have an advantage there."

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is right now."

Tuscola Mayor Dan Kleiss also is thrilled at the prospect that his city might host the first near-zero emission FutureGen plant.

"I am very excited about this, and hopefully, we will become the next site," said Kleiss. "It means good-paying jobs and good construction jobs."

City and Douglas County leaders watched the FutureGen Alliance news conference Tuesday morning from the Douglas County Highway Office.

Brian Moody, executive director of Tuscola Economic Development, said there was a lot of excitement when Tuscola was announced as one of the finalists.

"It's great to be rewarded after all the work that was put in," Moody said.

It will take about one year before the final FutureGen site is chosen through another rigorous scientific analysis of the four finalist sites.

"It's great to be recognized, even if we don't get it," said



Associated Press

Brian Moody, right, executive director of Tuscola Economic Development, looks on as Tuscola Mayor Daniel Kleiss, left, talks about the town being named a FutureGen finalist during a news conference Tuesday at City Hall in Tuscola. Two Illinois communities are among the four finalists for construction of a \$1 billion prototype of a virtually pollution-free coal-fired power plant, officials said Tuesday.

Lew Stiff, a Mattoon Planning Commission member. "If it goes somewhere else, there will be plenty of fallout for us."

The FutureGen Alliance is a consortium of the largest coal producers and users in the world. It formed a partnership last year with Depart-

ment of Energy to locate the best site in the United States to build the power plant. A total of 22 sites applied in April for consideration by FutureGen. In May, Mattoon, Tuscola, Marshall and Effingham were chosen as finalists among 12 sites in seven

sites, including Texas, Wyoming, North Dakota, Kentucky, Ohio and West Virginia.

FutureGen officials said the next step in choosing the plant site includes a comprehensive environmental evaluation and more detailed site characterization. At the same time, power plant engineering will move forward.

Angela Griffin, president of Coles Together, the county's economic development organization, was at the Illinois Coal Office in Springfield to hear Tuesday's announcement. She said she was confident because the local team that worked on the project was able to answer all of the questions it was presented.

"All along, I felt our site was solid," she said. "We knew we met the criteria. If we had not made the cut, I would have felt it was because of a reason beyond our control."

She will be part of the local group, along with teams from the other final sites, that will travel to Pittsburgh next week to learn about the next stage of the selection process.

Making the initial list for the project was enough to

help local economic development efforts, Griffin also said. Regardless of what eventually happens with FutureGen, there will be similar projects in the future, and the work has "raised the awareness" about the Coles County area as a candidate for them, she said.

"First and foremost, the local team has really proven itself under the most rigorous of circumstances," Griffin said. "I believe we have shown we have the ability to respond. All that just elevates Coles County for these kinds of projects."

Mattoon Area Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Mary Wetzel said the announcement was "positive news our community has needed and wanted."

Griffin also said she was proud of the teams working for the other Illinois communities on the list. All of the teams recognized "this truly remains a regional project," and the plant locating anywhere in Illinois would help the entire region, she said.

A reporter asked Kleiss, Tuscola's mayor, about the prospects of a friendly rivalry with Mattoon because Alan

Gilmore, Mattoon's city administrator, was formerly Tuscola's city administrator.

"We have spoken," said Kleiss. "He (Alan) called and congratulated Tuscola and Douglas County."

Kleiss added that both sites are viable, and it would be a plus for the region for either to host the plant.

Jim Crane, Douglas County engineer, agreed that the region would benefit, especially with construction. Tuscola is without a sizable firm to handle construction of the plant, so the work could go to either a construction company in Mattoon, Springfield or Decatur, he said.

Officials in Arcola said they consider themselves fortunate to be sandwiched between Tuscola and Mattoon.

"We are pretty excited that both Mattoon and Tuscola made the final cut," said Bill Wagoner, city administrator of Arcola. "This is pretty big for our area."

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