

# Illinois finalists ecstatic

Tuscola, Mattoon officials say cities would be good fit

By ANNE COOK

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TUSCOLA — Selection as one of four possible sites for a high-tech coal generation plant puts Tuscola on the world map, said Mayor Dan Kleiss.

Both Tuscola and Mattoon are on a short list of proposed sites for a \$1 billion not-for-profit FutureGen coal generation plant planned to serve as a demonstration site for clean technology.

"This would mean good paying jobs for the whole area," Kleiss said. He and other officials involved in the process of submitting a site proposal held a press conference at City Hall Tuesday afternoon to share

**Tom Kacich**

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their good news received earlier that day when the official announcement was made in Washington, D.C.

Brian Moody, head of the city's economic development office, said the potential purchasers have options on farmland west of Tuscola owned by Tunks and Pflum families near the Equistar and Cabot chemical production plants. The site is adjacent to U.S. 36 near the intersection of county roads 750 east and 1050 north.

Moody said natural gas

pipelines run near the site, there's plenty of water available from the Kaskaskia River and three rail lines are very close to bring in coal. He said the chemical companies in the area are looking for "synergistic" opportunities to share resources with the proposed plant.

A proposed ethanol plant would likely also be built in the same area, although no final announcement has been made about that project.

"Our geology's the same as Mattoon's geology," Moody said of one important consideration since plant planners intend to store unwanted by-products of

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Brian Moody, right, executive director of Tuscola Economic Development, listens as Tuscola Mayor Dan Kleiss talks Tuesday about their town's good fortune in being named a finalist for the FutureGen power plant.

# PLANT

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power production underground to reduce environmental impact.

Kleiss said he and Mattoon officials exchanged congratulatory phone calls Tuesday morning.

"If it can't be in Tuscola, Mattoon's a good spot," he said, noting that the job opportunities at either location would be good for the whole area.

The news was greeted with a roar of cheers in Mattoon, where city officials watched the webcast of the announcement in the city council chambers, and with praise from Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who said Illinois is the "logical choice" for the plant.

"We have the coal, the geology and the strong support on the federal, state and local level for bringing the world's cleanest coal plant to Illinois," Blagojevich said in a statement.

FutureGen officials say plant construction may generate as many as 1,300 jobs with a combined pay of about \$250 million. When construction is complete, the plant is expected to bring 150 permanent jobs to the community selected.

It's a joint initiative of the U.S. Department of Energy and FutureGen Industrial Alliance, a not-for-profit international consortium of private companies that use or produce coal.

They aim to build the world's cleanest power plant with near-zero emissions producing enough electricity to power 150,000 average U.S. homes. The plant will also produce a hydrogen gas that can be used in refineries or clean-burning hydrogen fuel cells.

A byproduct of this process, carbon dioxide, would be stored underground in geologic formations.

Moody said he thinks the Tuscola and Mattoon locations have an advantage because they're located in the middle of the country, something that's important because the plant officials want to burn both eastern and western coal, which differ in sulfur content, so they'll have to ship in coal from all over the country.

The Texas applicants at Odessa and Jewett have an advantage because they're very familiar with enhanced oil recovery, pumping chemicals into depleted wells to leach out the remaining oil, he said.

The final site will be announced in September 2007. Plans are to bring the

plant online by 2012.

Officials, who also include county engineer Jim Crane, county board member Chuck Knox and city administrator Drew Hoel, have been impressed with the planners' approach and an emphasis on science, not politics.

"So far it's been a non-political process," Moody said. "Their requirements are so strict."

There's been no indication that the location of the other two finalists in the home state of President George W. Bush might tip a political balance in their favor.

"The science is the key," Kleiss said.

Moody said FutureGen's first contact with the city was last January although the company had made anonymous inquiries before that.

"The day I found out about it I went over to the Illinois State Geological Survey and walked the halls," he said of that Champaign-based agency's invaluable help to the city while it was assembling information for its proposal. "There's lots of information just 25 miles away."

The state has appropriated \$17 million to help the cities cover costs during the next phase of the selection. Moody and other officials from the cities will go to Pittsburgh next week to find out more about what comes next although they already know extensive environmental studies will be part of it.

Kleiss, who's been mayor of the city since 1988, said he had no advance information about the sites picked until he watched the announcement on webcast from Washington on Tuesday morning.

"We're constantly looking to grow and expand our tax base," Kleiss said. "We've done well so far, and this is another step in that direction."

In Mattoon, city officials believe that their 240-acre site — located just northwest of the city — and FutureGen is a good fit.

"The structure of our land is a very compelling factor," said Charles E. White, the community's 73-year-old mayor. "We are just perfect for what they need."

David Wortman, the city's public works director and a key architect of the city's proposal, agreed that Mattoon more than makes sense given what those making the selection were looking for.

"We felt we met or exceeded everything on their list," he said.

*The Associated Press also contributed to this story.*