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Tuesday, March 31, 2009

## **Abilene, Texas – The Heart of the Wind Region**

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Broach the subject of wind energy most anywhere in America and, more often than not, you'll awaken visions of the decades-old wind farm in California's San Geronio Pass, a veritable airfield of 80-foot-tall, 40-kilowatt turbine units that achieved icon status thanks to a few fleeting seconds of screen time in the 1980's movie "Rain Man."

Iconic as the place may be, however, that windy stretch of Interstate 10 is actually more than 1,000 miles from the true wind-energy center of the United States, a title that belongs as much to the state of Texas as it does to Taylor County, and the county seat of Abilene.

Data collected by the American Wind Energy Association reveals that, at the end of 2008, the state of Texas accounted for about 28 percent of the nation's existing wind power capacity — far more than any other state. In addition, Texas also dominated in terms of future production, accounting for 37 percent of the national wind-energy capacity under construction.

As for Taylor County and Abilene, together they boast some of the longhorn state's biggest wind-energy projects.

All told, the Abilene area is home to about 750 existing turbine units with a combined capacity of more than 1,200 megawatts. Companies like FPL Energy, Edison Mission Wind and American Electric Power produce the power, then sell it to retailers and public utilities, such as Austin Energy, TXU Electric & Gas, and Direct Energy.

In fact, perhaps the biggest issue confronting Texas energy producers today isn't about producing power, it's about transmitting it, a challenge into which billions of dollars are being invested to resolve, says William J. Ehrie, president of the Abilene Industrial Foundation.

The situation represents a significant shift from the days when oil and gas dominated any discussion of energy in Texas. Indeed, Texas is so far ahead of other states it's one of the few places in the nation where energy goals have been achieved ahead of schedule. It intended to be using turbines to generate 4.5 percent of electricity statewide by 2015, but has already reached that mark.

None of it surprises Greg Wortham, who grew up 40 miles from Abilene, in Sweetwater, and went on to work for years as an energy attorney in Washington D.C.

“Texas Tech University doesn’t pop off someone’s tongue in Washington D.C., but that’s where the cutting edge research is,” says Wortham, who has since returned to Sweetwater where he serves as both the mayor and the executive director of the Texas Wind Energy Clearinghouse.

“This is the heart of the wind region,” says Wortham. “This is where the action is going on.”

Indeed, the action is so significant it’s made a believer out of oilmen like T. Boone Pickens, and has recently begun attracting competition from yet another green industry — solar energy.

In March, the Vote Solar Initiative purchased ads in several Texas newspapers, including the Abilene Reporter News, in an effort to rally support for more solar-friendly legislation. The ad claimed solar-energy producers and related businesses have the potential to create as many as 90,000 jobs in the state.

For now, however, wind remains the dominant focus of the future, and, according to Wortham, the best place to be a part of that future is along US Route 83, one of the longest north-south highways in the United States, stretching from the Veteran’s International Bridge at the border with Mexico, up through Abilene and all the way into Canada, where it becomes Manitoba Highway 83.

“That’s the center of the wind industry for the next century,” says Wortham. “Ninety-eight percent of what’s going to get built in the United States is going to get built on Highway 83.”

Hackman Capital Partners, LLC, is a part of that vision. It is an investor in a joint venture which acquired Windstar Industrial Center, a 782,000-square-foot warehouse/distribution facility, is located near the junction of Interstate 20 and Highway 83, along with another 100 adjacent acres, perfectly positioned to serve a variety of businesses related to the energy industry.

Michael Hackman, founder and chief executive officer of HCP, said his company chose to invest in Abilene because of its incomparable location and its tradition of investing in economic development and education.

“The federal and state incentives available to the green-energy industry continue to increase,” Hackman said. “But, Abilene generates its own economic development funds, and boasts a solid track record of using those dollars to help create jobs. Beyond that, the city also understands the critical importance of retaining existing businesses, and strives to improve the quality of life both aesthetically and by increasing the opportunities for learning at area colleges.”

Though Abilene is expected to benefit from \$550 million in renewable-energy dollars that the state is expected to receive from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, local investments are sure to surpass it, Hackman said.

“The local economy is very diverse,” Hackman said.

Despite all the growth in energy-related fields, Abilene’s largest employer remains Dyess Air Force Base, home to the 7<sup>th</sup> Bomb Wing of the Air Combat Command and the 317<sup>th</sup> Airlift Group, a unit of the Air Mobility Command.

Ehrie, of the Abilene Industrial Foundation, says the wind is all that remains of old-west notions of covered wagons traversing windswept desert plains.

“Abilene does have trees ... and yes we do have water,” Ehrie said. “It’s a very nice city in West Texas that has quite a few amenities (including a philharmonic and a newly revitalized downtown) ... We try to take care of our population as well as possible so that they feel very comfortable.”

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“Abilene, Texas – The Smart Place for Wind Industry Expansion” suitability study is now available at [www.windstarindustrialcenter.com](http://www.windstarindustrialcenter.com) by clicking on the “[Wind Action](#)” newsfeed.

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