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## **Abilene, Texas – The Wind Region the World is Watching**

*By Evan Calbi*

In the last several years, a stretch of West Texas along Route 83 has distinguished itself as the center of wind energy in the United States. Last month, what had been a regional phenomenon went global when China invested \$1.5 billion in a 36,000-acre wind farm in the area.

On October 29th, a partnership of Chinese and American companies announced a joint venture to construct a massive 600-megawatt wind farm at a location yet to be determined. The project, funded by the Chinese with grants from the federal stimulus package, will begin construction in March, 2010.

The partners in this venture include the Austin-based wind developer Cielo Wind Power, the U.S. Renewable Energy Group, an American investment firm, and A-Power Energy Generation Systems, a Chinese manufacturer located in the mainland province of Shenyang. The project, which will generate enough power to light 180,000 homes, will use 240 2.5-megawatt turbines manufactured by A-Power Energy Generation Systems.

The new investment is part of a larger commitment to the region's future as a center of renewable energy.

"The main asset—the wind—is here, land is available, and energy companies have great relationships with the state," says Bill Ehrie, president of the Abilene Industrial Foundation, an agency of the city's Chamber of Commerce. "The state has committed five to eight billion over the next several years to put additional transmission lines in the area, which will significantly increase the ability to move power. The first new line to San Antonio is already in place."

In the heart of this region, the city of Abilene has emerged as a leader in the renewable energy industry. With a community of 125,000, the city features close to 750 turbine units with a capacity of 1,200 megawatts. The Horse Hollow Wind Energy Center outside of the town accounts for more than half of that wind energy. Spread across approximately 47,000 acres in Taylor and Nolan counties, the Horse Hollow Wind Energy Center is the largest wind farm in the world with a total capacity of 735 megawatts. Other energy producers include FPL Energy, Edison Mission, and American Electric Power.

"Abilene understood early on that it was in the center of a new movement in renewable energy. They laid the groundwork to emerge as a leader in the industry, and continue to develop relationships with the businesses in the area," says Michael Hackman, founder and chief executive officer of Hackman Capital Partners, LLC, an investor in a joint venture which acquired

Windstar Industrial Center, a 782,000-square-foot warehouse/distribution facility near the junction of Interstate 20 and Highway 83, along with another 100 adjacent acres.

“We maintain a very close relationship with our business industry,” says Ehrie. “The companies have to have a support system, and Abilene has a regional airport, and good medical, housing, and schools. It’s an attractive location. Second tier cities have a lot of strength to offer.”

In 2008, Texas accounted for 28 percent of the country’s wind power capacity and almost 40 percent of the wind-energy under construction, according to the American Wind Energy Association. The wind corridor is expected to benefit from \$550 million in total renewable energy dollars from the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Despite the windfall of money coming into the area, Abilene continues to work to generate its own investments. *Business Development Outlook Magazine* called Abilene the nation’s 5th most eligible city for growth in a 2008 poll. More recently, Abilene was ranked 15th in the nation among top U.S. cities for small business, according to a recent list on CNNMoney.com.

“Abilene has a lot going for it,” says Hackman. “They are in the center of the fastest-growing renewable energy region in the country, and the city has worked to create a good climate for growth. With land as wide open as West Texas, you can honestly say that the sky’s the limit.”

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“Abilene, Texas – The Smart Place for Wind Industry Expansion” suitability study is available: visit [www.windstarindustrialcenter.com](http://www.windstarindustrialcenter.com) and click the “Wind Action” newsfeed.



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