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August 10, 2010

The Winds of Expansion Blow Through Abilene

by Amy Lyons

According to the American Wind Energy Association, the six largest windfarms in the United States are located in Texas. With more than forty windfarm projects— from the E.On Climate and Renewables wind farm in Roscoe, to NextEra Energy's wind farms in Horse Hollow and Capricorn Ridge—the wind power capacity in the Lone Star State exceeds 9,405 megawatts (MW). In July 2010, the city of Abilene garnered one more feather in the cap of Texas wind energy when Broadwind Energy announced it will locate its wind turbine gearbox repair and refurbishment facility—the first of its kind in North America—in the famously friendly city of wind.

Located 150 miles west of Fort Worth, Abilene is home to 120,000 residents who proudly maintain the frontier spirit. Situated on Interstate 20 and U.S. Highway 83, the city boasts immediate access to East and West coast markets, as well as the industrial Midwest, Northwest, and Northeast. Broadwind Energy already has a presence in Abilene, with its state-of-the-art wind turbine structural tower manufacturing plant, which began production in Abilene in February, 2009.

William J. Ehrie, president of the Abilene Industrial Foundation, said the gearbox refurbishment facility will be one more source of jobs and investment in the local wind energy sector.

“We have had a lasting relationship with Broadwind Energy and its subsidiary, Tower Tech, which is located here in Abilene. The relationship with Broadwind Energy has brought service industry jobs to Abilene and it gives us a great deal of capital investment for the city, which is great for our tax base,” Ehrie said. “With this new addition to the wind industry here—the gearbox servicing and refurbishing—Broadwind is creating a demand for jobs and capital investment.”

For MW-scale wind turbines in North America, gearbox repair and refurbishment have traditionally been performed outside the U.S. by non-domestic sources.

“With a large portion of the approximately 35,000 MW installed base of wind turbines in the U.S. now coming out of warranty, we see a growing need for a comprehensive solution for MW gearbox refurbishment services that Broadwind can provide,” stated Broadwind Energy CEO J. Cameron Drecoll. “By adding gearbox refurbishment up to 3 MW to our existing suite of kilowatt gearbox offerings, we will continue to grow our “one-source strategy” to help leverage existing customer relationships by adding additional services for our customers and cross-selling opportunities for Broadwind.”

(More)

This growth in the wind energy sector is not only a boon for Broadwind Energy and the city of Abilene, but for surrounding businesses. Michael Hackman, founder and chief executive officer of Hackman Capital Partners, LLC, said his Abilene-based property, WindStar Industrial Center—a joint venture formed by Hackman, Calare Properties, and KBS Real Estate Investment Trust—benefits when companies like Broadwind expand.

“What’s good for one Abilene-based business is good for surrounding businesses,” Hackman said. “Our multi-tenant manufacturing space at WindStar Industrial Center can only benefit from a new demand for high-quality space that inevitably comes with an expansion in the local wind energy sector.”

Located in the heart of wind country, on Interstate 20, midway between Dallas and Midland/Odessa, WindStar Industrial Center is a 728,000 SF, multi-tenant, manufacturing/warehouse and distribution facility on 102 acres. The center boasts 350,000 square feet available for lease, divisible to 25,000 square feet. It also includes 100 acres of land available for sale or build-to-suit opportunities.

Ehrie said properties like WindStar become more attractive as the wind industry grows.

“So many companies work with Broadwind and any demand for new facilities puts WindStar in a good position,” Ehrie said.

Broadwind anticipates that its enhanced wind turbine gearbox refurbishment capabilities will be fully operational in the second half of 2010, and will enable approximately 500 MW of annual wind turbine gearbox refurbishment, testing and field replacement.

According to the American Wind Energy Association, with the right government policies, wind energy could provide at least 20 percent of the nation’s electricity by 2030, creating an estimated 500,000 jobs without consuming any natural resource or emitting any pollution or greenhouse gases. For every 10 turbines installed, one skilled operations/maintenance job is created.

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WindStar Industrial Center (www.windstarindustrialcenter.com) is owned by a joint venture among entities formed by Hackman Capital (www.hackmancapital.com), Calare Properties (www.calare.com) and KBS Real Estate Investment Trust (www.kbsreit.com). WindStar Industrial Center has space available for lease at 1000 E. I-20 in Abilene, Texas. For leasing information, visit www.windstarindustrialcenter.com or call Paul Johnson Realtors at (325) 698-5661.