

Hendricks helping turn city around

By Cindy Iutzi/Gate City Staff Writer

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A Wisconsin-based firm plans to transform a portion of the Keokuk riverfront from a stark reminder of the area's industrial slump into a model of U.S. ingenuity and production.

Ken Hendricks of Hendricks Holdings Company, Inc. revealed his plans today to clean up the 85 acres of former Ferro-Sil property acquired last year and to build a wind turbine tower plant that will provide 400 to 450 jobs. He wants to see the plant in existence by this time next year.

"This is going to be a 400,000-square-foot plant," Hendricks said. "It will be the most modern tower plant in the world."

The property, including Southeastern Iowa Port Terminal, extends along the river, bordered by Roquette America, Inc., on the north and the Des Moines River on the south.

Hendricks and his wife, Diane, own and run Hendricks Holdings. Forbes Magazine estimated Hendricks' wealth at \$3.5 billion in March.

The investment in Keokuk's riverfront and plant will be in excess of \$40 million. Additionally, building a floodwall to protect the plant from spring flooding will cost about \$2,500 per linear foot, Hendricks said.

Gov. Chet Culver and Keokuk Mayor David Gudgel, officials from the Iowa Department of Economic Development, and state, county and local leaders attended the news conference this morning at Southeastern Iowa Port Terminal, 2301 Twin Rivers Drive, Keokuk.

"This investment in Keokuk has been on my working table for a year when I first met with representatives from Denmark," Gudgel said. "At that point, it was a dream for Keokuk that was well worth pursuing."

"Not until Ken gave me the time and date for the announcement did I take a great sigh of relief, knowing we are assisting in bringing skilled, well-paid jobs to Keokuk."

"Great admiration and praise needs to go to the city council for sharing my vision. They have been 100 percent behind this, and without their assistance it couldn't have happened."

"Ken Hendricks is a man of his word. His successes are well known. To have someone of his caliber investing in Keokuk is phenomenal."

The plant will manufacture two product lines for Hendricks Holdings. In addition to turning out towers, the plant also will be adaptable for building river barges.

"More than 50 percent of barges have been cut up for scrap steel because the price of steel has escalated," Hendrick's said. "Barge companies are cleaning out their fleets. There's a shortage of barges."

The wind turbine towers and river barges will be manufactured from heavy gauge steel Hendricks intends to purchase from local suppliers in Iowa, Illinois, Missouri and Wisconsin "if they can keep us competitive," he said. "We're very much 'Buy American.'"

The new jobs will require skilled workers. Hendricks Holdings will work with schools in the area to set up training for welding and other specialized tasks.

In addition to the tower and barge production opportunities, Hendricks is focusing on the transportation aspect of his local holdings.

“We plan on our transportation company to haul the towers by barge, rail and truck depending upon locations,” he said.

Southeastern Iowa Port Terminal, which Hendricks refers to as “the port of Keokuk,” also will be able to handle containers, coal, bulk commodities, steel and have warehousing capabilities.

The first order of business is to secure the many permits necessary to begin all the demolition and construction necessary for the plan to go forward.

“We'll need the cooperation of agencies like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the Iowa Environmental Protection Agency to expedite the permitting process so we can create 400 high-paying jobs,” Hendricks said.

He expects average pay to be \$20 to \$22 per hour.

Hendricks Holdings needs dredging permits and permission to raise the property above the 500-year flood level.

Part of Hendricks' plan for the riverfront calls for the relocation of the Alliant substation, a request that has been met with cooperation, Hendricks said.

“And most of the environmental issues have been cleaned up,” he said. “We are closer to a clean bill of health.”

Hendricks has worked extensively on the local level with Gudgel and the Keokuk City Council, as well as the state, county, port authority and state government to put the deal together.

“He's (Gudgel) been very supportive of the whole thing,” Hendricks said. “He's been more concerned about creating jobs for people in the community than any other mayor I've ever worked with.

“We need to put Keokuk and Fort Madison to work. I take great pride in providing opportunities for people to get their dignity back by going back to work. There is no dignity without a job. People who are able to work need a job.

“Good jobs support the rest - restaurants, convenience stores, buying homes, boats, motor homes, sending kids to college and trade schools. The most important thing, and your mayor knows this, is to create jobs.

“I've always reinvested in people. Every dime I have is to create jobs for people. I don't live that lavishly. I have no mansion, no limos. That ain't me.

“We take a lot of pride, family pride in our work, and everyone who works for me is a part of the family.” ABC Supply Co., Hendricks' flagship roofing supply company, received a Gallup Great Workplace Award this year. ABC is one of the 12 best companies in the world for which to work. ABC Supply Co., was founded by Hendricks 25 years ago.

“I expect no less from our plant here,” Hendricks said. More than 10 million employees worldwide were studied for the award. The cornerstone of his attitude toward employees is respect, fair pay and active involvement in the company, according to a story in the Janesville Gazette, Janesville, Wis.

Hendricks Industries, also owned by Ken and Diane Hendricks, has wind tower plants in Denmark and Germany.