

The News-Gazette

Area rallies in support of FutureGen

By Tim Mitchell

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ARCOLA – In most parts of the world, children aren't happy to receive a lump of coal from Santa Claus.

That's not the case in Douglas and Coles counties, where children gleefully accepted lumps of coal from Santa Claus on Sunday as part of a FutureGen for Illinois rally at Arcola High School.

"This is very, very cool," said 6-year-old Jacob Smith of Mattoon as he accepted his piece of coal.

With the help of the Tuscola High School cheerleaders, jolly old St. Nick tossed out coal to an estimated 450 people who packed the gym to celebrate East Central Illinois' efforts thus far to land the \$1.5 billion, near-zero-emissions FutureGen coal power plant.

They were also there to send a message to the FutureGen alliance that there's strong public support to bring the world's cleanest power plant to Tuscola or Mattoon.

Those two area communities are competing against Odessa and Jewett in Texas to land FutureGen. The FutureGen board is expected to announce a site during the third week of December.

The Arcola High School gym was rockin' for most of the afternoon. When the Tuscola cheerleaders weren't leading cheers, the site was filled with the music of the Mattoon Green Wave marching band, the Arcola High School drum line and even the Eastern Illinois University Jazz Ensemble.

Arcola was selected as the site for the pep rally because it is midway between Tuscola and Mattoon.

Probably the biggest ovation of the day went to Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Director Jack Lavin, who announced three more endorsements for Tuscola and Mattoon.

Lavin said Gov. Jennifer Granholm of Michigan and Gov. Joe Manchin of West Virginia are throwing their support behind building the pilot plant in Illinois.

"They understand that what works in Illinois will work in other states," Lavin said.

In addition, Lavin announced that the nation's largest coal mining labor union, United Mine Workers of America International, is throwing its support behind Illinois.

"A coal project of this importance belongs in a coal state," said union President Cecil Roberts.

The winner could realize 2,500 construction jobs and another 500 permanent jobs related to the power plant.

The plant is expected to produce enough electricity to provide power for 150,000 people. Construction would begin in 2010, with full-scale operation starting in 2013.

Glenn Poshard, president of Southern Illinois University, said getting FutureGen would be important for the coal-mining industry in the state.

Much of the abundant coal here can't be used because of its sulfur content and the resulting carbon dioxide emissions when it's burned. The polluting gas has been linked to global warming.

Since FutureGen would send carbon dioxide a mile beneath the surface of the earth, where it would dissipate, the plant could bring about a whole new market for Illinois coal.

Poshard said FutureGen is needed from a national perspective as well.

"Is \$200 per barrel of oil in our future," Poshard asked. "Will soaring, uncontrollable energy costs be the lot of our children? Here lies the solution to most of those problems. Build FutureGen, right here, in Tuscola or Mattoon, and we'll put the coal industry back on its feet, revive our economy and provide clean energy to meet the needs of our future and the safety of our people."

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Illinois, said Tuscola and Mattoon are ideally located at the center of the nation's greatest coal fields, making it cheaper to transport coal to either site. He said Illinois has 38 billion tons of recoverable high-energy bituminous coal reserves, the largest in the nation.

"Illinois' high-energy bituminous coal reserves contain more energy than the oil reserves of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait combined," Durbin said. "Having FutureGen in Illinois would increase our nation's ability to produce reliable energy, improve the environment and reduce our dependence on foreign oil."

Lavin said the area's proximity to the coal research centers at Southern Illinois University and Purdue and to the University of Illinois and the Illinois State Geological Survey, as well as Eastern Illinois University, Lake Land College and Parkland College, also makes it ideal to host FutureGen.

Durbin praised the way Tuscola and Mattoon have worked together in an effort to land FutureGen.

"We've had great cooperation from start to finish," Durbin said. "I couldn't get over how the communities of Tuscola and Mattoon worked to make sure that one of us wins."

Lavin said Sunday's large turnout at the rally sends a powerful message to the FutureGen alliance.

"We're in the home stretch, in the bottom of the ninth and at the two-minute warning," he said.

States that have endorsed locating FutureGen in Illinois:

Indiana.

Kentucky.

Michigan.

Ohio.

Pennsylvania.

West Virginia.

Wisconsin.

Wyoming.