

# Journal & Gazette Times - Courier

## **OUR VIEW: FutureGen shows collaborative efforts work**

By the JG/T-C Editorial Board

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The thunderous collective roar that was more like a boom that came from the Time Theatre building Tuesday morning was the welcome mat being extended to the FutureGen Alliance from East Central Illinois.

The packed hall erupted with cheers from a few hundred people representing a variety of backgrounds on hand to hear the site selection decision. The choice of Mattoon is the beginning of a partnership between the piece of prairie we call home in East Central Illinois and a worldwide alliance working to be part of the solution to energy demands.

The welcome news immediately lifted the spirits of an area that's taken a few economic hits in recent years. Now comes the unique chance to merge our needs to progress economically with the opportunity to showcase how future energy needs can be met with reduced pollution and more jobs.

As we focus on the bright future, it's appropriate to recognize those who were instrumental in showcasing our region to FutureGen.

Locally, Coles Together President Angela Griffin and David Wortman, the Mattoon public works director, were leading forces working on providing the reams of material that went into the selection of the Mattoon site. Those two were unwavering in their conviction that the decision would be based on science, and that Mattoon is the best site. They certainly had a lot of help, but their leading roles were pivotal.

On the state level, Jack Lavin, the director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, was the leading force in marshalling resources and building support within the state and from neighboring states, along with research institutions and labor groups. His boss, Gov. Rod Blagojevich, was at his best during a late-morning rally Tuesday in the still-packed former Mattoon theater.

The state's commitment to coal, and to FutureGen, were critical to the announcement Tuesday, and Lavin's department was first rate in the lead role.

Lawmakers had an important role as well, with state Sen. Dale Righter and Rep. Chapin Rose strongly advocating for our region, while those such as Rep. Bob Flider supported from neighboring areas. At the federal level, Sen. Dick Durbin was a key advocate along with several representatives, including John Shimkus, Jerry Costello and Tim Johnson.

Also on stage Tuesday was Glenn Poshard, a former area congressman who now is president of Southern Illinois University, where the clean coal institute is a key player in the future of coal development. Poshard said the announcement for Mattoon opens doors for another generation of coal miners.

The celebration had a national championship feel, and rightfully so. This area is worthy of the role it is about to play in energy policy and the energy debate.

Certainly, there are challenges ahead, including funding battles at the federal level, which have already begun.

But the announcement Tuesday is a watershed. It is a once-in-a-lifetime day that is likely to leave a lasting, positive legacy on our region.

One thing that's particularly clear is that collaborative efforts work. They work in politics, they work in economic development and any number of other situations. Collaboration sometimes is messy, requires sharing the credit and multiplying the benefits.

That sharing was evident Tuesday, and needs to continue.

Our thanks and congratulations to those involved, and we look forward to a brighter future together.

— JG/T-C Editorial Board