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Windsor becomes a whirl beater

Small Colo. town was perfectly positioned to land top wind-turbine maker's first North American plant

By Aldo Svaldi
Denver Post Staff Writer

In a county that boasts 12,000 oil and gas wells, Colorado's future as an alternative energy hub is taking shape. Vestas Wind Systems, the world's largest maker of wind turbines, is preparing an empty field in Weld County for the construction of its first North American plant.

"With Vestas coming in, we get the one piece that has been missing from the energy picture here. We now have a major manufacturer of renewable energy components," said Laura Brandt, economic development director with the Metro Denver Economic Development Corp.

The plant, which will be located at the Great Western Industrial Park in Windsor, represents a \$60 million investment by Vestas, based in Randers, Denmark.

Once the plant opens early next year, Vestas is expected to employ more than 400 people to produce 1,200 wind turbine blades annually.

Vestas' importance to the state goes beyond the dollars it is investing and the good-paying jobs it is creating, economic development officials said. Until Vestas, the state's proclaimed advantages in renewable energy didn't translate into a large payoff in manufacturing activity, outside of ethanol, Brandt said.

"We now have other manufacturers looking at the state within the renewable-energy industry," she said.

Colorado is rich in sunshine, wind and the crops to create ethanol, all key renewable-energy resources.

Work being done at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, along with Colorado State University and the University of Colorado, makes the state a leader in research and development in the field.

Gov. Bill Ritter campaigned on the



Special to The Post

Vestas Wind System's Horns Reef project, above, rises high out of the North Sea, off the coast of Denmark.

development of renewable energy, and the state legislature has boosted the amount of electricity from renewable sources that utilities must use — evidence of political support for the industry.

Those mattered, but in the end it was Windsor's central location between wind-generating areas in the Midwest and California and easy access to Burlington Northern and Union Pacific railroad lines that sealed the deal.

Windsor beat out 42 other sites to host the new plant, said Alex Yeros, managing director with the Denver-based The Broe

BY THE NUMBERS

Vestas wind turbines are massive. Dimensions on the V90-3.0 MW, 50 of which were ordered by BP Alternative Energy North America:

295.3 diameter, in feet

68,480 area swept, in square feet

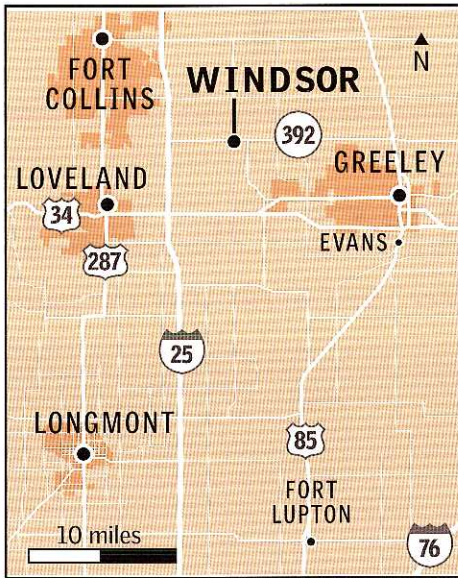
16.1 revolutions per minute by three blades

492 maximum tower height, in feet

111 weight, in metric tons

Source: Vestas Wind Systems

WINDSOR: Town beat out 42 other sites



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Group, developer of the Great Western Industrial Park. Rail is the easiest way to move the massive blades, which are about 130 feet long.

As an added benefit, Great Western last

month was added to Denver's foreign-trade zone, eliminating tariffs on foreign goods coming into the park.

Weld County's workforce was another key consideration.

Although the county's unemployment rate is a relatively low 4.1 percent, many residents commute elsewhere for work, said Larry

Workers inspect a blade at the Vestas factory in Lem, Denmark. (Special to The Denver Post)Burkhardt, chief executive and president of Upstate Colorado Economic Development.

"We can talk about them being underemployed. This will give 400 people the opportunity to perhaps work closer to home," Burkhardt said.

Colorado couldn't match the large cash incentives other states used to lure Vestas, but it did put together the largest worker training and recruitment package in the state's history, Brandt said.

Workers with the skills Vestas needs are not easily available anywhere in the

country; early hires will go to Denmark for specialized training.

Windsor sits centrally between Greeley, Loveland and Fort Collins, east of Interstate 25 at the midway point between Denver and Cheyenne. Now home to about 15,000 residents, Windsor's roots go back to the late 1800s, when it was a distribution hub for sugar-beet farmers. Until it closed in the 1960s, a Great Western Sugar plant was the town's largest employer.

Kodak filled the gap not long after by locating a manufacturing plant in Windsor, eventually employing more than 3,000 people in the late 1980s.

As digital photography sends photographic paper the way of the sugar beet, Kodak has struggled, cutting jobs and selling off 1,400 acres of Weld County land it acquired in the late 1960s.

Vestas is building its new plant on some of that land.

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