

Industry: Business on the upswing

By JOHN LOWMAN | Posted: Thursday, April 14, 2011 2:00 am

ANGLETON - Business is picking up at area industries, and several are planning to expand or already are doing so, representatives of five Brazoria County companies said Wednesday.

Representatives of Dow, Denbury Resources, Freeport LNG, Mammoet and Shintech addressed the quarterly Economic Development Alliance for Brazoria County luncheon at the Technology Center Banquet Room at the former Intermedics building Wednesday. Across the board, executives predict better economic times.

"I look for our growth to continue," and go in the direction of exports, said Jim Hodges, site manager of Shintech's Freeport facility. "As I see it, this is going to ensure our future at the Freeport site."

Shintech, which is a subsidiary of Shin-Etsu of Japan and manufactures mainly polyvinyl chloride, is in the process of a \$21 million expansion to its packaging department. Hodges said 60 to 80 percent of his company's production is exported. The Freeport plant also is helping make up for production interrupted in Japan by the massive earthquake and tsunami last month.

Readily available natural gas is leading to expansion at Freeport LNG, said Keith Little, a company vice president. Freeport LNG plans to eventually invest about \$2 billion into fitting its facility to process domestic natural gas instead of just imports.

The permitting process will be "an arduous task," since it involves a considerable amount of government regulation, Little said, but added things are positive in Brazoria County.

"We've gotten enormous support at the local level," Little said.

The company will employ about 1,000 people during expansion and will add about 25 full-time employees to its current staff of about 100.

Things are looking up at Dow Texas Operations as well, said Gary Hockstra, vice president of Dow Texas Operations. The company currently employs 4,400 people and about 3,000 contractors, he said. There are 65 plants at the Freeport site.

The economic crash of 2008-09 forced Dow to shut down some of its plants, but business is returning, Hockstra said.

"We're seeing a significant turnaround of the company, but more importantly, here in Freeport," he said.

Affordable and abundant natural gas is helping Dow be more competitive internationally, he said. Dow likely will hire about 200 people in the Freeport area this year, he said.

Denbury Resources injects carbon dioxide into declining oilfields to bring out more oil, said Abel Salazar, district manager for Denbury's West Region. Denbury is pulling about 1,400 barrels of oil a day from the Hastings field between Alvin and Pearland.

Injection of CO₂, or "flooding," began Dec. 16, and the prediction is for Denbury to continue growing in Texas, the southern United States, Montana and Wyoming, Salazar said.

"We're just growing and growing," he said. "We'll be doing quite a bit of hiring over the next two or three years to help us keep up with this flood."

Mammoet USA South is in the process of building a new headquarters off FM 521 near Rosharon. The company, which specializes in heavy lifting and hauling, "is a very strong and growing business in Texas," said Guus Stigter, director of U.S. sales.

He stressed Mammoet's community involvement and safety, saying everything the company does has a safety component to it. Mammoet is involved in community efforts, including youth and civic organizations. He said Mammoet's best asset is its employees and their families.

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