

New Encinal park

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Lewis Energy Group held a groundbreaking ceremony on Thursday in Encinal for the La Salle Railway and Industrial Park, which will facilitate the continuing growth and expansion that the company and South Texas are experiencing as result of the Eagle Ford Shale production of gas and oil.

Rick Smart, Lewis Energy vice president for global operations, said the new facilities will be developed to include tenants not involved in the oil and gas industry.

"It's not going to be strictly geared to the oil field. We're going to develop this in the best way for Encinal," Smart said.

"It's very exciting and the minimum that we hope to do is create 100 to 150 jobs by the end of 2014. Hopefully, it will be more than that.

But that's one of the things that we're all about: growth in South Texas."

Smart said rail switches will be built into a system of approximately 4 miles of track included in Phase I of the plan.

The gate entrance to the facility will be on State Highway 44.

"Our proximity to Laredo and the Union Pacific yard is going to be a huge benefit for the rail for several initiatives," Smart said.

He added that a sand and a chemical company will be two of the first tenants, but they hope to continue to expand as the need arises.

Bret Smart, manager of services division, said the huge impact the Eagle Ford has had on cities in the area cannot be underestimated.

"We could have some very large players come in and want to be a part of what we're doing here," he said.

"The facility is going to be quite large we will have space for new development for companies to come in and really put a footprint right in the center of the southwestern portion of the Eagle Ford."

Rod Lewis, CEO of Lewis Energy, said the property where the new railway and industrial park is being built was the first ranch he bought in the 1990s.

At the current gate entrance is a small wooden structure covering what Lewis said was a water well once used to fill the tanks for the steam locomotive engines that passed through.

He said there was a wooden house built in the 1920s in which a caretaker for the railroad lived.

Lewis had the house disassembled and the wood was used to build another house on another ranch.

He described how operations on the property being developed used to be home to onion production.

Lewis said it was significant that the historical property was once again important to the local economy.

"We've become more integrated and self-sufficient. I just want to do the best for the team that works for me, for my family and for the community. That's what this is all about," Lewis said.

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