

## NEWS

## Expanding energy Company touts growth, collaboration

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About 30 community leaders from South Texas were guests of Lewis Energy Group on Tuesday morning as they were led on a tour of the company's newly expanded operations center in Encinal.

The Lewis Energy Operations Center serves as the base in South Texas for drilling, pipe fabrication, hydraulic fracturing, vehicle maintenance and administration.

Among the guests were state Sen. Judith Zaffirini; Leodoro Martinez, Middle Rio Grande Development Council executive director; and Gilbert Gonzalez and Andrew Denzer, from the University of Texas at San Antonio Rural Business Program.

Craig Rosenstein, Lewis Energy chief administrative officer, has worked for Lewis Energy for 11 years and hosted the tour.

"Lewis Energy owned about 15 acres when I started, and now our site and facilities have increased to include over 100 acres," Rosenstein said.

"We have gone from 200 employees to 1,200."

Rosenstein said Rod Lewis, Lewis Energy Group owner, is committed to supporting the communities where the Eagle Ford Shale formation is located by finding local talent to fill the company's divisions. More than 60 percent of the company's employees are from Laredo.

They earn an average of \$16 an hour.

Lewis Energy will play an increasing role in developing training programs, such as welding, for the industry at educational campuses and at the company's facilities and job sites.

Area universities, such as Texas A&M International University, Texas A&M University - Kingsville and UT - Pan American, will soon see more involvement as research institutions for the industry, with UTSA already studying the impact on rural communities.

"Collaboration and organization are necessary so that these state institutions and committees do not step on each other's toes," said Zaffirini, chair of the state's higher education committee.

The area is experiencing a housing shortage while permanent housing developments are being created.

An average of \$8 million a month is paid out to about 1,000 vendors, ranging from trailer owners and truckers to suppliers and caterers.

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Photo by Cuate Santos | Laredo Morning Times  
Lewis Energy Group's Rick Smart and other employees talk about heavy pumping equipment used in hydraulic fracturing in the oil fields of South Texas during a tour of the newly expanded Lewis Energy Operations Center in Encinal on Tuesday morning.

Jose Ceballos from America's Natural Gas Alliance provided a presentation explaining how natural gas has changed the energy market.

Shale gas is projected to drive a 50 percent increase in natural gas production in the U.S.

This will lead to lower energy imports.

Although natural gas use in the U.S. has declined, the alliance is encouraging more use for electricity production and in vehicle conversions and development.

Zaffirini said many legislators do not understand the impact of Eagle Ford Shale, seeing it as affecting only South Texas, and that the industry needs to have experts ready to testify before the Legislature.

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