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Ethanol project draws former governor and basketball coach

By Chris Blank
The Associated Press

A former governor and a former college basketball coach are among those who will help lead a planned ethanol plant in northeastern Missouri.

Mississippi Valley BioEnergy announced plans Wednesday to build a 100 million gallon ethanol plant in West Quincy - just across the Mississippi River from Quincy, Ill.

Former Missouri Democratic Gov. Roger Wilson serves on the company's board of directors, and former University of Missouri-Columbia men's basketball coach Norm Stewart is on its advisory committee.

Both Wilson and Stewart live in Columbia.

Board President Susan McNay said plans for the ethanol plant have been under way for almost a year, and that the former governor and coach each expressed interest in getting involved in the project.

Wilson was twice elected lieutenant governor and briefly served as governor after Mel Carnahan died in a 2000 plane crash. Stewart was born Shelbyville in northeastern Missouri and coached the men's basketball team from 1967 to 1999.

The list of company leaders for the West Quincy project also includes two former members of the University of Missouri Board of Curators, Sean McGinnis and James Sterling, and two former Missouri Corn Growers Association presidents.

"It started out as family and friends, and these people are family and friends," McNay said.

Wilson did not immediately return a call seeking comment, and a phone number registered to Stewart was disconnected.

McNay said the company chose northeastern Missouri because it's a hub for corn.

Lawmakers in 2006 approved legislation that, starting in January 2008, would require gas stations to sell gasoline blended with ethanol whenever the price for the alternative fuel is cheaper than regular gas. That law has helped fuel a boom in ethanol, biodiesel and other biofuels and prompted current and former lawmakers, Gov. Matt Blunt's brother and others to seek investment opportunities.

Ethanol is a grain alcohol made by turning plant starch into sugar, fermenting it and adding a small amount of natural gasoline to make a mixture that can be used as fuel in most engines when blended, often in a 10 percent mixture with regular gas.

Currently, Missouri has operational ethanol plants in Craig, Laddonia, Macon and Malta Bend. Other plants

have been slotted for Carrollton, Liberal, Sikeston and St. Joseph.

Documents filed with the secretary of state's office in 2006 show 15 companies sought permission to recruit private investors from Missouri to nearby projects - the most ever.

The crush for ethanol investors extends beyond Missouri. Of the 15 companies seeking investors, nine were projects planned for other states.

McNay said Mississippi Valley BioEnergy hopes to start construction in 2008.
