Economic ripple effect seen in Boeing plant

By JOHN LaPLANTE
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The location of a big Boeing plant in Lake Charles should boost the Baton Rouge economy as well, and it might encourage other industries to locate in Louisiana, business experts said Friday. Lake Charles will get the plant if Boeing gets a major military contract it is seeking.

"If nothing else, we won't have to continue to carry Lake Charles, which, since it has a high unemployment rate, has been consuming more than its share of welfare checks, unemployment benefits and other costs related to a poor economy, he said.

Even more direct ripple effects will be felt as far away as Baton Rouge, said Wes Stucky, vice president of economic development for the Baton Rouge Chamber of Commerce. Labor unions played a part in landing the plant for Lake Charles by agreeing, as a group, not to do anything to slow work on the facility, said Gordon Flory, secretary-treasurer of the Louisiana AFL-CIO.

Attracting such a lucrative industrial project "means that we have a favorable climate. We have a trained labor force. We're willing to sit down at the bargaining table with any company and do whatever is necessary to provide jobs for the people of the state," Flory said.

"This project is the product of many," said Gov. Edwin Edwards. "It was clear that, the spirit of what can be done when local, state and federal officials work together." The state has committed $37.5 million to the arm. In addition to the 1,400 jobs Boeing is bringing directly, there will be many other jobs in service industries now owned by Calcasieu Parish, that will enable us to diversify our economy.

"Another $1.4 million has been appropriated to the local trades school to train plant workers," Edwards said he hopes the incentives "will establish a long, lasting and profitable relationship." U.S. Rep. John Breux, D-La., praised the decision as "the best news I've received in the 14 years I've been in Congress." Rep. Preston Moore, R-La.: "It shows what can be done when local, state and federal officials work together.

"I am positive it's going to put us on the route to recovery," Lake Charles Mayor Ed Watson said. "It's a real shot in the arm. In addition to the 1,400 jobs Boeing is bringing directly, there will be many other jobs in service industries that will enable us to diversify our economy."

"It pleases me to see Lake Charles and southwest Louisiana take the lead in the diversification of Louisiana's economy, to get us away from our reliance on oil and petrochemicals," the mayor said.

Buddy Threatt, managing editor of the Lake Charles American-Press, said Sunday editions the newspaper will contain a special 8-page section welcoming Boeing to Lake Charles.

Rodney Dubon, business manager for the Southwest Louisiana Construction Trades Council, "I know this -- it is in my heart and in my mind -- that God gave us another chance. I just hope we deserve it." The council coordinates activities of region's 15 labor unions, all of which promised not to strike during construction of the Boeing facilities.