

Hentges: Wal-Mart 'committed' to city

Distribution center is in the 'near term of five-year plan'

By Dan Linehan

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MANKATO — Wal-Mart is committed to building a distribution center in Mankato, the local delegation that returned from a trip to the company's Arkansas headquarters said Friday.

"We exchanged presentations and we came away with a clear indication that they are strongly committed to Mankato," Mankato City Manager Pat Hentges said.

Mankato Community Development Director Paul Vogel and Greater Mankato Growth President and CEO Jonathan Zierdt joined Hentges on the trip.

As far as a timeline for construction, Hentges would only say it is in the "near term of their five-year plan."

Other details he learned are private company data, he said.

"I have nothing but good feelings coming away from this trip," he said.

The distribution center and its estimated 500 to 700 jobs, with a payroll of more than \$21 million, have been eagerly awaited since the facility was announced in

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late 2005. The city estimates another 550 jobs might be created in other industries related to the project.

A recession has started and ended since then, and Wal-Mart has repeatedly delayed the project.

But Hentges said those who remain skeptical should know the company has invested "well over \$8 million" in the Mankato site.

Company officials also gave the delegation a tour of the Bentonville, Ark., distribution center. "Unless you've been in one, you really don't have any idea what they involve," said Hentges, who called its operations and efficiency "truly unbelievable."

While there wasn't much new information released after the trip, it left Hentges repeating an often-used phrase about the distribution center: "It's not a question of 'if.' It's a question of 'when.'"