

May 2016

Good News for the Local Economy

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Recommended Citation

Skybetter, Rachel (2011) "Good News for the Local Economy," *Seek*: Vol. 1: Iss. 1.

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The national unemployment rate may be staggering, but employment opportunities are about to balloon in Manhattan, Kan. By the time the National Bio and Agro-defense Facility is open for business, it will employ about 350 people, reaching an eventual goal of about 500. But the number of jobs that will be created in Manhattan because of NBAF is much greater — and completely unpredictable.

When Manhattan was selected as NBAF's future home in January 2009, the calls immediately started pouring in from companies anxious to make their mark on what will become the nation's center of animal and agricultural health.

"The announcement triggered lots of phone calls from all kinds of different companies — from pharmaceutical companies to animal science research companies," said Lyle Butler, president and CEO of Manhattan's Chamber of Commerce. "They want to be where the action is, and the action for this kind of research is going to be here in Manhattan, so that has brought a lot of companies to say, 'When that gets built, we want to be there.'"

These companies, which cannot be named because it is too early in the planning stages, won't break ground for many years. Some only wish to rent office space, while others have expressed interest in building their own facilities, Butler said.

Of the 350 employees who will work at the 500,000-square-foot facility when it's slated to open in 2016, about 100 to 150 will be scientists and researchers with high salaries. The remainder

will be support staff: lab technicians, maintenance workers and administrative support for NBAF, jobs that will be filled by Manhattan residents. Manhattan Area Technical College President Rob Edleston plans to expand the school's lab technician program to prepare graduates for the level of work NBAF and the 20 to 40 related companies expected to move to Manhattan will require. Courses are slated to begin in 2011.

"You're not going to have a lab tech move from Plum Island, where the current facility is located," Edleston said. "We're going to grow them here."

The scientists and researchers affiliated with NBAF and the surrounding laboratories will boast high-paying salaries, which will be funneled back into the local economy and real estate market, creating more jobs and businesses for Manhattanites.

"This facility and the 250 to 350 jobs that come with it are economic drivers in the community, and that's certainly one of the reasons we committed our economic development funds to winning NBAF," said Manhattan Mayor Bruce Snead.

The magnitude of how incoming researchers will impact Manhattan goes far beyond their scientific experiments.

"The folks who work at NBAF are going to buy cars and groceries, they're going to go to the movies, eat at restaurants and buy shoes," Butler said. "All of that helps businesses, and the more you have that, then the more other businesses you're going to attract to the region."

And those are just the people who will work inside the 500,000-square-foot facility. An estimated 1,500 to

1,600 construction workers will be in the city over the four- to five-year time period NBAF will be built, according to Kansas State University Vice President for Research Ron Trewyn. The majority of the contractors, construction workers, plumbers and electricians will hail from the region and will also utilize Manhattan's hotels, restaurants and retail stores.

Manhattan residents can expect to see a very different north side of town in the future as scientists flock to be closer to what will become the center of animal disease research, which will lead to more residences and commercial spaces being built.

"Researchers want to be as close as possible to the research that's going on at K-State, BRI and NBAF," Butler said. "In an ideal world, they would like to be able to walk across the street and collaborate with other researchers."

NBAF is expected to bring vast numbers of visitors from around the world, leading to the construction of at least two hotels and opening up the option for many restaurants and retail stores, but it's too soon to predict the scope of NBAF's effect locally.

"Manhattan is going to evolve and change over the next 20 years. It's not something that's going to happen tomorrow or next week," Butler said. "But for the quality of life of the community, there's going to be growth that will create very high-paying, good-quality jobs. I think Manhattan is a very fortunate community."

By Rachel Skybetter, Communications and Marketing



Good news for the local economy

More jobs are coming to Manhattan, Kan.