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'Micro' steel mill to bring 100 jobs

JJ Hensley

The Arizona Republic

Mar. 15, 2007 12:00 AM

Economic development is coming to the Williams Gateway Airport area, with more than 100 jobs and no strings attached.

There might be an environmental thread or two connected with Commercial Metals Company's decision to build a \$130 million "micro mill" on the former TRW site southeast of Williams Gateway, and the city offered a pittance of incentives to land the employer.

A letter from Mesa City Manager Chris Brady to CMC executives offered to waive about \$92,000 in fees for the project, but Jim Fritsch, CMC's executive vice president of the steel division said that was small potatoes for a project of this magnitude.

"That's nothing. The state of Arizona doesn't feel like they need to offer any incentives and that's fine with us. We feel like our projects need to stand on their own," Fritsch said.

The project will stand with plenty of land around it.

The plant will likely occupy about 30 acres, with an additional 45 acres around the site for expansion. The remaining 200 acres of the former TRW plant will serve as a buffer between CMC's mill and its surroundings.

"The site provides a buffer zone to ensure we're good neighbors," Fritsch said.

Construction on the plant is expected to begin in early 2009, provided the company receives clearance from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Mesa City Council. The plant will take about two years to build, Fritsch said.

When complete, the mill should employ between 100 and 110 workers with salary and benefits packages in the \$65,000 range.

The relationship should produce high-quality jobs for Mesa, and could help reduce the price of steel in the area, said Teri Killgore, Mesa's former economic development director, who helped put the deal together.

"It's obviously a big win for the city," Killgore said. "I think a lot of people hear steel mill and they think Pittsburgh in the '70s. What we've learned through this process is that steel manufacturing is a much cleaner industry."

The micro mill plant is the first CMC will build in the United States, Fritsch said.

Previously, the company built plants known as "mini mills," which produce steel cuts for a variety of industries. There are four CMC mini mills in operation throughout the United States.

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