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### **City, Business Leaders in Blair Cheer Wal-Mart Announcement**

**OMAHA, Neb., April 20, 2010** – The nation’s largest retailer is moving in to one of Nebraska’s fastest growing counties, a merger that is brimming with positive economic overtones. Wal-Mart announced last month that it is planning to build a 100,000-square-foot store in the city of Blair in Washington County.

“It’s a great town with good people, a vibrant community and it is part of a growing county. And, I think the big thing, too, is that we have a lot of Blair customers right now, they just can’t go to a store in Blair. We want to fix that problem,” said Ryan Horn, Wal-Mart’s senior manager for public affairs.

With completion expected in 2012, the new store — roughly half the size of a Wal-Mart supercenter — will be located in Blair’s Hayden Place, a 65-acre mixed-use development on Highway 30.

“I think this store will be the perfect size for a smaller city like Blair,” said Horn. “But, it will still have virtually all the product selection you would expect, including a full grocery store, a bakery, a deli and all the general merchandise departments that you count on at Wal-Mart.”

The Blair Wal-Mart is likely to employ between 200-300 people, roughly 50 percent of them full-time, all of them eligible for healthcare coverage.

“There’s a lot of great economic benefits and employment benefits that come from a Wal-Mart,” said Horn. “You have all the added benefits that the community gets in terms of charitable contributions. (Wal-Mart was the largest corporate contributor to charity last year, donating upwards of \$500 million nationally and worldwide.) And, you have the effects on the tax base when you start re-capturing some of the sales tax from Blair residents that had been leaving the area to do a lot of their shopping.”

Blair Mayor James Realph cheered those tax implications, saying an increase in sales tax revenue could help hold the line on property taxes.

“That sales tax revenue will provide us with some financial assistance as we do projects. If you don’t pay for them with sales tax, you’d have to pay for them with property tax,” said Realph.

He acknowledged concerns some have about Wal-Mart’s potential impact on established Blair businesses like Ace Hardware, Ortmeier’s TV & Appliance and Carnes Paint & Decorating.

“The businesses we have on Main Street are very service-oriented, very much a part of this city. I know I’ll still go to Ace Hardware because of their service and know-how,” said Realph. “We see Wal-Mart as an expansion of the shopping opportunities for the people of this community.”

The mayor is hopeful fellow Blair businesses will benefit from Wal-Mart’s arrival.

“You might have people come down from Burt County or Harrison County, Iowa. And, instead of going to Fremont or Omaha to the Wal-Mart, they’ll come here, go to our Wal-Mart, maybe grab a sandwich and go to a movie. You hope that is something that will carry over and create some more retail-type business here in the community.”

Sarah Chatt, vice president of Washington County Bank and president of Gateway Development Corporation, is optimistic Wal-Mart will attract new businesses that will bring additional goods and services to the area.

“Wal-Mart signals a positive view on the market. It sends a message to other businesses that are looking to start up or relocate that Blair is the place to be,” she said.

Gateway Development Corporation is a nonprofit organization, governed by a board of directors and funded by both private and public investors, including Washington County and the city of Blair. Over the last two decades, its mission has remained constant — spearhead efforts to bring economic opportunity, capital investment and new business to the community it serves. Gateway has been housed at the Greater Omaha Chamber since 2002 and is part of the Greater Omaha Economic Development Partnership, a one-stop economic development organization that promotes Douglas, Washington, Sarpy and Cass counties.

“This announcement, along with several other recent improvements, announcements and growth opportunities, shows a positive economic outlook for Blair and the surrounding area and allows us to showcase what Washington County has to offer,” said Chatt.

While Gateway did not work directly with Wal-Mart, it has worked closely with the developer of Hayden Place, Mary Berg and other businesses that have located there. Berg said the Wal-Mart announcement has, indeed, sparked an interest among other businesses in coming to Blair and Hayden Place.

“Since the announcement, we’ve had a lot of calls from parties interested in lots,” said Berg.

Right now, there are about 10-acres of commercial land available in Hayden Place and 50-acres of residential or office space.

“We’ve had quite a few inquiries on some multi-family housing, some assisted living and several office users,” said Berg. “We’ve also talked with several hotel developers.”

Hayden Place’s retail strip center currently includes Great Clips, Anytime Fitness, Maid-Rite Restaurant and Scooters Coffeehouse. Deb Jensen owns the Hayden Place Scooters and believes the addition of a Wal-Mart will be good for her business.

“We’re really excited about it,” she said. “We chose our place based on the development that’s happening there. More retail means more traffic.”

Hayden Place is also home to a new, state-of-the-art headquarters for about 90 employees of Cargill’s Corn Milling business unit. The 30,000-square-foot building is close to the company’s massive Blair biorefinery.

“It’s good to see Hayden Place fulfilling its vision. I don’t think we could be more thrilled with our new facility or our location,” said Cargill’s Tom Guinan. “Looking at the orderly growth we’ve seen since Cargill has been here these past 15 years, it’s a pretty good indication that the city is in good hands and poised for the future.”