

Golden Gore future anticipated

By **SONIA GERKEN** in Gore

GORE DISTRICT chief executive Steve Parry has predicted this year would be "bigger than Ben Hur" if Solid Energy advances plans for a multibillion-dollar plant to process its vast lignite resources in Eastern Southland.

"It's exciting, yet frightening," said Mr Parry as he reflected on what had been a remarkable 2009.

After years of speculation, last year the Government-owned coalminer announced investigations that could result in the development of the biggest industrial complex in New Zealand.

It was involved in a joint venture study with Colorado-based GTL Energy into a briquetting plant at the old Maitava paper mill, another with fertiliser company Ravensdown into a \$1.4 billion coal-to-urea plant, and studies into a \$10b to \$14b lignite-to-liquid fuels plant.

Solid Energy new energy general manager Brett Gamble said investigations into the latter two plants were being carried out in tandem because of their complexity and scale but it was likely the smaller project would proceed first.

By June the company should know whether or not it would progress to the next stage, a feasibility study. That would involve assessing which technology would be used, where the plant would be located, and environmental and social impact assessment work, Mr Gamble said.

Mr Parry said the environmental issues were significant but the

resource consent process would take care of them.

It would be the social and urban development issues that would test the council, he said.

The coal-to-urea plant would require a work force of about 1500 and provide 500 permanent jobs.

Among the questions already being tossed around were the impact of assimilating 1500 people into the community, where would they live and what would be the demand on infrastructure and services, Mr Parry said.

Then there was the issue of where the support industries would be established and whether the council should promote a brown-fields development, where existing land was used and revitalised, or a greenfields site.

Mr Parry admitted he had already had people knocking on his door wanting to get involved or offer their services.

Gore could become a real economic powerhouse, even regain the golden glow of the 1960s, when it was one of the richest towns in New Zealand per capita, Mr Parry said.

Solid Energy had already made many new millionaires in the Gore district with its estimated \$50 million spendup on farms a few years ago to secure the lignite.

Mr Parry said personally he was eager to see the arrival of big corporates in the district. Gore has Solid Energy and Dongwha, with Fonterra on its boundary. There were local authorities that would love to have just one of those in their back yard, he said.

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