

## Good Times At Pea Ridge Mine?



Written by Will Sites

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SULLIVAN – Good times again at Pea Ridge mine. That's the gist of a public meeting held Sept. 30 at the Sullivan Community Center to discuss the opening of the well-known iron ore mine a dozen miles south of here off State Highway 185 in Washington County. The geological home turf of some of the richest iron ore minerals known to exist, the reopening of Pea Ridge is garnering as much interest as the mine bankruptcy and closing did in 2001.



That's because locals know that a mine can lead to good jobs for generations – and mining is something this town knows a lot about. “This project has tremendous possibilities for the community and the U.S.,” Kennedy told the crowd of about 50 interested citizens that included a few former Pea Ridge employees.

Kennedy, who came with his wife Nina, said that local mining would help reduce the national trade imbalance, create jobs for 50-plus years, and can generally create substantial opportunities. Interestingly, the number of producers of pig iron (used to make steel) in America is zero, said Kennedy. The product from Pea Ridge will be used to make steel in the U.S., instead of importing pig iron from Brazil or Sweden. The local mined product will be refined and transported to a Mississippi River port for shipment to steel mills. “We can build a logistical system that locks us in to a long future,” Kennedy said. “At least 50 years of production for what's known,” Kennedy said. “It can be substantially more than that.”

Furthermore, he noted, the resource could contribute “well past us and our children.” And according to state experts, Kennedy's optimistic facts and figures appear realistic. Meet Doyle Childers. Anyone seeking a permit to disturb soil or water in a major way needs a nod from the director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – that's Childers. During Tuesday's meeting, Childers certainly seemed to be on board with Kennedy's plans. “Sounds like everything is being done right,” said Childers, who noted his own background in geology and agreement with opening the mines. Unlike lead mining – which can be very destructive to humans and the environment – iron ore is basically benign, said the DNR director. Although noting that the DNR is an environmental watchdog, Childers said that his department is working with Kennedy to move forward. “There's still some issues to be worked out,” said Childers, “but we are working with them.”

Some of those issues include financing and engineering. Kennedy noted that a lot of the hurdles have been cleared, but some final plans need to be completed. “We are at financing finalization and final engineering,” said Kennedy. It wasn't made clear Tuesday night exactly what engineering plans need to be finalized – such as how the product will be shipped or where it will be shipped to. The next 12 months, Kennedy said, will be spent focusing on engineering and environmental issues, such as tailings, reclamation, etc.). As for hiring, Kennedy said that nine months to a year before that happens, except in limited amounts. The anticipated number of employees was not discussed, but the state appears ready to bring time, training and funding into the region when the mine opens.

“We're looking at growing local businesses and putting training dollars here,” said Mike Nichols, project manager for the Missouri Department of Economic Development. Nichols told the crowd that the local economy will benefit from the mines because of an increase in wages, more sales tax revenue, new homes will be built and school districts will grow. “We're looking at a \$16-17 million return to the state in 10 years,” said Nichols. Admittedly, there's a lot to do before throngs of miners return to buzzing up and down Hwy. 185. But it's going to happen, says Kennedy and the politicians and state officials that share his vision. “This has been analyzed very carefully,” Kennedy said. “Financial institutions believe it.” That hurdle, says Kennedy, is being cleared.

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And then maybe it's good times again at Pea Ridge mine.

### Timeline of Pea Ridge Mine

1950 – Initially discovered in as a major magnetic anomaly.

# Sullivan Journal

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1957 – Developed by Bethlehem Steel and St. Joseph Lead Company under the name Meramec Mining Company.

1964 – Operated with only three interruptions, producing over 30 million tons of pellets, fines, heavy media and other iron products by 2001.

1990 – The mine lost its last iron ore pellet customer, shifted to specialty products.

2001 – Iron ore prices spiraled downward, mine goes bankrupt. Upland Wings, Inc. purchases Pea Ridge Iron Ore Mine.

2005 – Upland Wings forms Wings Enterprises for the development of the resources

2008 – Plans unveiled at Sullivan Community Center.

(\*Source: wingsironore.com)

## **About Pea Ridge Mine**

\*One of seven major iron ore deposits in the U.S.

\*One of three and largest one that's been mined

\*World-class mine

\*One in Sweden that compares

\*Highest quality iron ore minerals known to exist on Earth

\*172 million tons of proven iron reserves, probably more

\*The deeper you go, the better the ore gets

\*May produce other rare elements

(Source: Missouri Dept. of Natural Resources)