



Forney population to double with Herbert Hunt investment

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FORNEY — This city got its name from the railroad executive who brought trains to town almost 140 years ago, but its future now lies with another well-known name.

"This is going to end up being the gateway to and from East Texas," said W. Herbert Hunt.

At age 83, Hunt — of the famous oil family — rarely gives interviews, but he insists he has no intention of slowing down at work.

"You sound like my kids," Hunt told News 8 with a chuckle. "They all want to know when I'm going to retire. I don't know what else to do; I can't stay home."

He is backing Forney's new Gateway project.

On Thursday, Hunt will join city officials and the public to break ground for a new bridge that will span Highway 80 and the Union Pacific Railroad line.

The bridge is more than an overpass, though. It will link the north and south sides of Forney on the eastern side of the city.

But Hunt is also developing a master-planned community on 1,400 acres he owns in the city which would include residential, retail and perhaps hotels.

"You're probably talking about a total investment over the next decade of several billion dollars," Hunt said. "It's Forney's future."

The city's last big development was when Wal-Mart came to town six or seven years ago.

Forney has never seen a project of this magnitude; it will be the single biggest in city history.

"This will probably fuel a good doubling in size [of Forney's population] anywhere from 20,000 to 40,000 with it," said City Manager Brian Brooks.

Hunt had the land, Brooks said, and the city had the transportation need, with no bridge connecting the north and south sides of Highway 80.

The bridge is a unique public-private partnership.

Hunt is funding almost \$10 million of it. The city is kicking another \$3 million, and the Regional Transportation Council is paying for the remainder.

Trains no longer stop in this city, but Hunt and Forney both believe their future lies in the fields along the tracks.

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