

SolFocus solar company expanding site in Mesa

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Mesa is poised to become a leader among solar cities.

California-based SolFocus has expanded one of its global manufacturing sites to East Mesa and plans to quadruple its workforce by adding 150 jobs by the end of the year, said Nancy Hartsoch, the company's vice president of marketing.

The facility, which opened two years ago near Greenfield Road and Loop 202, manufactures concentrated photovoltaic systems, which use mirror optics to focus concentrated sunlight on solar cells to generate electricity.

Last year the company deployed twin solar power systems on two sites in Castilla-La Mancha, Spain. The two sites generate about five megawatts of electricity for the country's power grid.

The company is also working on a 10-megawatt system in Greece and a number of other projects that will produce 10 to 15 megawatts. A 10-megawatt system would meet the residential needs of a city of 40,000 and keep 27,000 tons of carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere, company officials say.

The Mesa facility with its new line of manufacturing equipment will produce about 2 million mirrors annually, which will be used in creating 30 megawatts of solar power generation.

By 2010, the company's goal is to produce enough equipment at the Mesa plant to generate 85 megawatts of power.

"Government bodies, utilities and large scale commercial operations are quickly recognizing that CPV can deliver three times the efficiency of traditional solar systems with lower land use," said Mark Crowley, president and chief executive officer of SolFocus. "With more than \$150 billion of stimulus money available for clean energy projects worldwide, competition for available product supply will be tight, so the time is to act now."

Already Mesa has stepped up to establish itself as a solar-friendly business city.

The city has allowed SolFocus to use a water treatment facility to test some of its future products, which is saving the city about \$200 a month on its electric bill.

"I think any time you have a successful business in an industry, whether it's the microchip industry or the solar industry, certainly other (businesses) will look to see what experiences that company has. If

they can come here and establish an opportunity, others will see this as a place to do business," said Mesa Mayor Scott Smith.

Family connections also helped lure the company to come to Mesa two years ago. Jason Ellsworth, the company's vice president and general manager of the glasswork facility, has deep roots in Mesa. His great grandfather was an early settler of Mesa and has a road named after him.

"I think the importance Jason brought is the knowledge that Arizona and Mesa is great place to do business," Smith said.

"One of the challenges we have is selling the benefits we have besides great weather," he added. "Having someone like Jason who didn't need to be sold was exactly what helped us get over that big hump. Without Jason's assistance I don't think this would have happened."

The economic impact of SolFocus will likely be felt Valley wide. The company relies heavily on local labor and suppliers, which represents about 50 to 60 percent of its total expenses.

Ellsworth said the company uses local contractors and builders for custom equipment for quick turnarounds.

"This is a place that has a strong work ethics and a fantastic valley with a quality of living when looking at places to build and manufacturing supplies for SolFocus," he said.