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ASU, Albuquerque company form new solar partnership

by *Ryan Randazzo* - Apr. 16, 2009 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

2 comments

Albuquerque-based Advent Solar Inc. will hire a team of engineers and partner with [Arizona State University](#) to develop more efficient solar-power systems at the SkySong innovation center in Scottsdale.

Advent, which is just down the road from Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico, chose to work with ASU because the university's [Solar Power](#) Laboratory is a leader in the solar field, President/CEO Peter Green said.

That combined with ASU President Michael Crow's push for sustainability helped bring part of the company's research to Arizona, Green said.

"ASU is the most outstanding institute to work with on solar in the country," he said.

Advent is part of a growing cluster of companies related to sustainability at SkySong, including [American Solar Electric](#), Litree Purifying Technology Co. from China, and Heliae Development, an algae-fuel company.

In the next three months, Green will begin hiring experienced engineers as well as recent graduates to assist with

Advent's research. The team will work with the ASU Solar Lab to increase the efficiency of solar systems.

Green couldn't say how many employees Advent would need, only saying it was "not a huge number but sizable in capability."

Advent has six employees housed at SkySong. Some, including Green, live in Arizona but commute to Albuquerque when needed.

Advent has about 45 employees at a small manufacturing and research facility in Albuquerque that produces panels that can generate 25 megawatts of energy, or enough to power about 6,000 homes at once.

The company has sold solar panels across the U.S. and Europe, but officials decided last year to focus on research and development, rather than manufacturing.

Now the firm develops solar-system technology that it can sell to other companies that can "ramp it" to mass production.

"We work out all the kinks," marketing manager Matt Christison said during a recent media tour of the plant.

Like other solar-panel manufacturers, Advent is in a race to develop the lowest cost-per-watt of energy-producing capability. The ASU partnership should help that effort, officials said.

ASU officials said the partnership benefits the [university](#), which also boasts a solar-panel testing facility in a partnership with TÜV Rheinland Group of Germany. That new facility opened in January south of Broadway Road on Roosevelt Street.

The ASU Foundation is a partner in SkySong, and the university has partnerships with 42 companies from 11 countries at the center, said Julia Rosen, associate vice president for ASU innovation and entrepreneurship.

Even if Advent and other partner companies don't have large workforces in Arizona, the contacts are beneficial to the school, she said.

"Our goal here at SkySong is to help build an infrastructure for the state that can raise the global profile of Arizona," she said.

ASU is interested in building relationships with innovative companies from the U.S. or abroad, Rosen said.

"We see value in working with companies because we can ensure the university is relevant in solving the most difficult market challenges," she added.

Green said Advent is looking to expand more, and is considering Arizona and other Western states.

"We wanted to do more in Arizona," he said. "We still are evaluating options in different states, many of which are more aggressive with incentives than Arizona."

Reach the reporter at 602-444-4331.



Advent Solar

An Advent Solar worker prepares a wafer cassette in Albuquerque. Advent Solar plans to hire experienced engineers as well as recent graduates from Arizona State University to help develop solar-power systems at SkySong in Scottsdale.

MORE ON THIS TOPIC

Advent Solar Inc.

Headquarters: Albuquerque.

Activities: Small manufacturing plant for solar panels; research and development on panels, manufacturing and solar-energy systems.

Employees: 45 in New Mexico and now hiring engineers in Scottsdale.

Founded: 2002.

Technology: Licensed from Sandia National Laboratories, where founder James Gee worked for 18 years before starting Advent.

Ownership: Private, with about \$118 million in venture funding raised.

Investors: @Ventures, Battery Ventures, EnerTech Capital, Firelake Capital, Globespan Capital Partners, New Mexico Co-Investment Partners, Sun Mountain Capital and ZBI Ventures.



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