

New Mexico Business Weekly - February 9, 2010

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NEW MEXICO BUSINESS WEEKLY

Tuesday, February 9, 2010, 2:55pm MST

Noribachi launches ABQ solar firm

New Mexico Business Weekly - by [Kevin Robinson-Avila](#) NMBW Staff

The **Noribachi Group** is launching a new company in Albuquerque to build solar panels.

The new firm, **Solar Distinction Inc.**, says it will employ about 300 workers within two or three years, eventually growing to about 500 employees. The plant is set to open by year-end 2010, with enough operating capacity to produce 25 megawatts of solar panels, said Noribachi Partner Joe Gillach. It will expand to a 50-megawatt capacity within two years.

"We're in negotiations now, on multiple fronts," Gillach said. "We're looking at land to build on as well as existing buildings for the plant. We'll announce where it will be located within 30 days."

This is the fifth company launched by Albuquerque-based Noribachi, a venture accelerator established in 2007 to adapt solar and other clean technologies to everyday consumer products.

Noribachi created two companies in Albuquerque last year. **Visible Light Solar Technologies** makes lights that combine light emitting diodes (LEDs) with solar photovoltaic panels. **Qnuru** (pronounced kuh-new-roo) makes artistic sculptures to encase the LED-solar lights for indoor and outdoor use.

Noribachi also launched San Francisco-based **Regen Inc.** last fall to make and market solar-powered consumer electronics, and it created **Green by Design**, a California Web site for environmentally aware consumers that offers information, education and ratings for green products.

Gillach said Noribachi is currently incubating another six or seven companies.

"They're in various stages of development, from early stage incubation to late-stage companies that are almost ready for launch," Gillach said. "That's our model. We incubate startups inside Noribachi and then launch them when they are ready for market."

Noribachi spent about a year developing the business model and plan for Solar Distinction.

"Today's announcement marks the birth of that company," Gillach said. "We're already interviewing senior management to run it."

Once operating, Solar Distinction will supply all the solar panels used by Visible Light, Qnuru and Regen. Those firms now buy panels made in China, Gillach said.

"We're bringing manufacturing jobs back on shore and into New Mexico," he said.

Noribachi co-CEO Rhonda Dibachi said it makes more sense to locate manufacturing operations as close to their point of use as possible.

"Shipping solar panels from Asia makes no more sense today than shipping oil from the Middle East when communities like Albuquerque have the engineering talent and manufacturing capacity to create photovoltaic technologies at a comparable quality and cost," Dibachi said in a news release.

Noribachi's latest endeavor shows New Mexico offers the infrastructure, intellectual capital and manufacturing capabilities needed for new ventures, said **New Mexico Economic Development** Secretary Fred Mondragón in a prepared statement.

"The Noribachi Group's entrepreneurial spirit and success is helping to make New Mexico the leader in the generation of next wave technologies," Mondragón said.

The state will award a \$500,000 job creation grant to Solar Distinction through the Local Economic Development Act to support the jobs generated by the firm.

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