

# Qnuru lights up NM parks, schools

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Courtesy Qnuru

Vector lights from Qnuru top stylish lampposts at one of three parks in Santa Fe where they've been installed.

Qnuru's home-grown solar lighting technology is reaping a large crop of customers in New Mexico and beyond.

Since summer, Qnuru (pronounced kuh-new-roo) has installed solar-powered light emitting diode bulbs and fixtures, known as "vector lighting," in three municipal parks and five public schools in Santa Fe. More projects are in the works statewide, and in cities on the East and West coasts, said Qnuru President and CEO **Rhonda Dibachi**.

“We’re experiencing tremendous sales momentum,” Dibachi said. “We had a 196 percent increase in quarter-over-quarter sales in the third quarter. We sold our 2000th vector LED bulb, and we doubled our network of distributors and installers.”

Those are substantial accomplishments for a company that burst into the energy efficiency lighting market about 18 months ago. Qnuru was established last year in Albuquerque by Noribachi LLC, a venture accelerator that creates and adapts solar and clean energy technologies for everyday consumer products.

The company, which operates at a 45,000-square-foot building in the North Interstate 25 corridor, combines solar photovoltaic collectors with LED bulbs. Its products can be used to replace lampposts and lights, or as drop-in solutions to retrofit existing fixtures. They include smart chips that automatically turn bulbs on and off with motion and changing light levels, while seamlessly switching back and forth between solar and grid power, depending on sunshine.

Qnuru also sells a line of stand-alone LED bulbs as drop-in retrofits for existing light fixtures at commercial and industrial businesses. And, this month, it launched a new line of screw-in LED bulbs for homes, to replace incandescent and compact fluorescent lights (CFLs).

“The LED bulbs are 50 percent more efficient than CFLs, and the light is much better,” Dibachi said. “They cost more, starting at \$12 for a lamp bulb and up to \$60 for the highest wattage, but they last 50,000 hours.”

The company makes all products at its Albuquerque facility, but uses partners to distribute and install lights locally and nationally.

“We’re a product company, not a service company,” Dibachi said. “We export to other states, so the money comes back to New Mexico and the jobs remain here.”

The firm employs 35 in Albuquerque – up from 17 in April – and it’s hiring 10 more, Dibachi said. It partners with about 35 distributors and installers nationwide, but expects to increase that to 100 by early next year.

**Rich Hoke**, CEO of Albuquerque-based Digital Traffic Systems Inc., said his company now distributes and installs Qnuru’s entire line of products.

“We’ve done eight to 10 projects in New Mexico,” Hoke said. “The market is growing. Qnuru is in the right place at the right time to take advantage of it.”

DTS recently installed 140 vector parking lights at four elementary schools and a high school in Santa Fe. The lights are projected to save about 204,000 kilowatt hours of electricity annually, and \$22,400 per year in reduced maintenance costs, said **Lisa Randall**, energy conservation program coordinator for the Santa Fe Public School District.

“It’s a great opportunity to save on our utility bill and invest in alternative lighting sources,” Randall said. “We’d like to make this a standard in all our schools.”

The Santa Fe Parks, Trails and Watershed Division also installed 25 vector lights in three parks – Frenchy’s Field, **Salvador Perez** and **Monica Lucero**. Division Director **Fabian Chavez III** said the city saved a lot of money compared to traditional lighting, while getting more benefits.

By installing solar-powered LED lamp- posts, the city avoided \$250,000 in trenching to connect traditional lights to the grid. With vector lighting, installers just pour a concrete foundation and place the pole in the ground.

“It’s like a big flashlight,” Dibachi said. “You just stick it in with cement to make sure it doesn’t tip over.”

The city is expected to see between 50,000 and 100,000 hours of use from the LED bulbs.

“That means we’re looking at five to 10 years before we need to replace them,” Chavez said.

The city is considering more vector lights for pedestrian and bike trails.

“They’re solar lights, so we can put them anywhere, without having to depend on the grid,” Chavez said.

Hyde Memorial State Park in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of northern New Mexico recently retrofitted its parking lot lights with Qnuru LED bulbs, and more state parks around New Mexico are considering the same.

Outside New Mexico, Qnuru and its partners are negotiating large projects in San Francisco, Boston and Montana.

“We’re in conversations with many public and private customers,” Dibachi said. “We started in our own backyard. Now we’re working our way outward.”

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