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Solar conundrum

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The plus side is that Precision Flow Technologies is creating 190 new jobs at Tech City, continuing the company's trajectory from a two-car garage in Saugerties to an international exporter of components for solar power and LED lighting with growing operations in Kingston and in Colorado.

The down side is that, so far, America is yawning at the news.

"Unfortunately 90 percent of what we make, goes to China or the Asian market," said Precision Flow President and CEO Kevin Brady, giving a problematic ending to an upbeat event announcing the company is hiring the new workers in addition to the some 200 current workers it already employs.

The hiring is paired with a \$1.2 million upgrade of the company's 40,000-square-foot leased space at Tech City, creating 31 additional jobs for half a year of construction work.

The new hires come from across the spectrum from entry level to skilled engineers and administrators, said Brady, addressing a press conference at Tech City where the new hiring was trumpeted as further evidence that creation of a solar energy manufacturing

cluster in the Hudson Valley is having a positive effect on the area's economy. The Solar Energy Consortium, a nonprofit trying to foster the solar cluster, hosted the event.

While the focus was on Precision Flow, public and private officials touted the teamwork that has led to 15 new companies connected to the solar power industry opening in the area since 2007.

"All the people of this region are going to benefit," said U.S. Rep. Maurice Hinchey, whose seat on the appropriations committee in the House of Representatives has helped him steer some \$30 million to solar businesses in New York since 2007, including about \$8.4 million in funding to Precision Flow and one of its corporate customers, C9 Corporation, for Defense Department work related to advanced energy technologies.

Beyond defense applications, Precision Solar is making components for LED lighting and solar plastic films, said Brady, whose privately held company has risen since 1997 from four employees laboring in Brady's garage in Saugerties to a 40,000-square-foot facility in Saugerties and recently leased space at Tech City.

"He's the entrepreneur's entrepreneur," said Tech City President Alan Ginsberg, whose own entrepreneurial fortunes seem on the upswing after years of frustration turning the former IBM plant into a productive facility again. Now, Ginsberg said the 250-acre facility is 60 percent occupied, with 250,000 square feet rented just in the last year, he said.

He joked that when he tells people his business is marketing commercial real estate they commiserate, "And I have to tell them, no, I had a great year," said Ginsberg.

Ulster County Executive Michael Hein credited Ginsberg for his acumen revitalizing the Tech City site: "This is redevelopment, as opposed to new development so we can move now at the speed of business." And Hein touted the "alignment" of efforts between the private sector, TSEC and public officials on all levels of government as aiding the successful bid to bring solar power companies to Tech City and the Hudson Valley.

Hinchey, Ginsberg and Hein all predicted additional jobs in coming months and years, with Hinchey forecasting 400 additional new jobs would be created this year and 1,000 new jobs by the end of 2011.

The rosy scenarios are predicated, at least in part, on development of a market to purchase components related to renewable energy and solar power and thermal applications. So far, there has been no major influx of capital to begin financing such development. Thus, Brady's company sends 90 percent of its products for such items elsewhere.