

Opinion: SE Valley cities' preparation lands jobs

by [Southeast Valley editorial board](#) - Mar. 23, 2011 10:14 AM
 Our View

Arizona lost a higher percentage of jobs than most states during the recession. But the Southeast Valley is turning that around.

Major job-creation announcements have been made in recent weeks, including Intel's \$5 billion plant in Chandler that will employ 1,000 and First Solar's \$300 million factory in Mesa that will employ 600.

These are **quality** jobs in growing industries, the kind that create spinoff work for local suppliers and spread economic benefits across the Southeast Valley.

[First Solar coming to Mesa](#) | [Mesa hustles](#)

First Solar announced Thursday that it is purchasing 135 acres with an option for 100 more on the former General Motors Desert Proving Ground. Its location - at Elliot and Signal Butte roads, northwest of Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport - is significant. The factory could serve as a catalyst for similar development in an area that is projected to become one of the state's largest employment centers.

First Solar could one day employ 4,800 people on the site, making it slightly larger than Boeing's Mesa campus and the city's largest private employer.

Future phases will be market driven, so it could be years before the factory reaches

that size. But the solar industry is rapidly expanding in the **Southwest**, and unlike other factories in the region, the Mesa plant is not simply assembling components that were manufactured overseas.

It will have the capability to turn a raw piece of glass into a finished product in 2 1/2 hours, a state-of-the-art process that will likely involve significant research and development. That should boost the demand for highly skilled engineers and create additional opportunities to partner with researchers at nearby Arizona State University Polytechnic.

Tempe-based First Solar could have gone anywhere to build its plant. Competition from New Mexico and **Texas** was particularly fierce.

Yet, unlike several years ago, when Southeast Valley cities gave away millions of dollars to encourage retail development, Mesa snagged the plant without offering tax breaks or other traditional incentives.

It didn't need them. Company officials said they chose the city because of its location, its shovel-ready site and its willingness to

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expedite the construction process.

Intel officials have echoed similar sentiments in choosing Chandler to upgrade its computer-chip manufacturing lines.

That doesn't come by accident.

Chandler and Mesa spent years planning for these uses, conducting engineering studies, granting land entitlements and setting cash aside to widen roads and extend water and sewer lines. They were ready to strike when opportunity came their way.

It's been said many times on these pages that cities should use this economic slowdown to prepare for when growth resumes. Recent job announcements are proof of what happens when they do.

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