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Solar energy firm hoping to build in the Carrizo Plain expanding in Northern California

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HAYWARD — OptiSolar Inc., a fast-growing solar energy firm, will undertake a big expansion of its operations and work force in the East Bay and Sacramento.

The company has rented a 60,000-square-foot building for its headquarters in a Hayward business park, said Colliers International and Jones Lang LaSalle commercial realty brokers who arranged the lease.

"We're a growing company and we simply ran out of space," said Alan Bernheimer, a spokesman for Hayward-based OptiSolar. "We are at almost 500 employees and we are adding to that." A year ago, OptiSolar had fewer than 200 workers, Bernheimer said.

As of Thursday, OptiSolar had 61 openings, of which three-dozen were in Hayward, according to an online job posting site. The rest were in Sacramento.

"We are still hiring aggressively in the Bay Area," Bernheimer said. The company now occupies two Hayward buildings and by sometime in 2009 will place its headquarters in the third building that it has just rented.

OptiSolar makes thin-film solar photo voltaic panels and also produces electricity from its own large-scale solar farms.

In August, Pacific Gas & Electric Co. announced a deal to obtain power from OptiSolar's 550 megawatt Topaz Solar Farm project in San Luis Obispo County, which would power 164,000 homes. The project is expected to begin power delivery in 2011 and be fully operational by 2013. OptiSolar's expansion is one of several indications that solar power companies might find the East Bay hospitable for their expansion and new facilities.

"The East Bay can definitely accommodate the growth of these companies," said Brady Thomas, a Colliers broker. "We are seeing a number of companies — green builders, solar energy companies, clean technology companies — that are expanding here."

In May, DayStar Technologies, a solar energy firm, announced plans to lease 157,000 square feet in Newark. Solar company PowerLight agreed to move its operations to an old Ford Motor auto factory in Richmond. And Solyndra plans a major expansion in Fremont in 2009.

Founded in 2006, OptiSolar intends to grow beyond the Bay Area. With its most recent lease, OptiSolar has three buildings in Hayward. It also plans a 1-million-square-foot solar factory in Sacramento that will employ 1,000.

A Beacon Economics researcher recently told a gathering in downtown Oakland that the East Bay could become a "Green Corridor" as alternative and clean technology firms look to the area to expand.

"A lot of companies are downsizing, giving back space and contracting," Thomas said. "Green and solar energy companies are one of the few in growth mode right now."

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