

# THE POWER OF THE SUN

The search for renewable-energy sources is making clean-tech jobs hot.

BY DANIEL MCGINN

**B**RAD MOHRING HAD reached a crossroads. Until recently the 31-year-old design engineer had worked for a Toledo, Ohio-based company that builds manufacturing equipment for automobile plants. With the auto industry struggling, he figured it was only a matter of time before he'd be laid off. So this spring he began looking for a new job. In a few weeks he had four offers. Today he could have been working for a giant defense contractor or an established agricultural company. Instead, he chose the lowest-paying job—and became the 20th employee at Xunlight, a Toledo-based solar-energy firm. "I left a job I'd worked at for

12 years to join a start-up," says Mohring, who has a 1-year-old child and another due in February. "It's something of a gamble, but if it pays off, it pays off big."

It's becoming a common bet. With oil prices near record highs and more companies concerned about their carbon footprints, workers are finding job opportunities in the emerging green economy. Companies are hiring scientists to work on renewable-energy technology and business people to market earth-friendly products. Even if some of these nascent companies falter, there's widespread conviction that this sector will become one of the country's hottest employers. "This is the challenge of the 21st century ... and it's not going away," says Kevin Doyle, founder of the consulting firm Green Economy.

It's impossible to say precisely how many people work in green jobs—partly because there's no formal definition of the term. Does a clerk stocking organic produce at Whole Foods Market qualify? How about an engineer working to make a coal-fired power plant run more efficient-

ly? Meanwhile, in sectors like solar energy and biofuels, payrolls are growing so rapidly it's hard for researchers to keep an accurate count. Despite the lack of precise numbers, all observers agree the ranks are growing quickly. Based on the flow of venture capital, K. R. Sridhar, CEO of the fuel-cell start-up Bloom Energy, believes the clean-tech sector could produce 50,000 new jobs by 2010. (By way of comparison, General Motors' hourly work force, which briefly went on strike last week, currently numbers 73,000.) Peter Beadle, president of Greenjobs.com, cites estimates that the solar sector alone could employ 2 million people by 2020—more Americans than currently work as elementary-school teachers.

During the last decade's dotcom employment boom, much of the job creation was concentrated in Silicon Valley. In contrast, green jobs are popping up all over—some of them in very unexpected places. A good example is Toledo, a rust-belt manufacturing center with no shortage of vacant downtown buildings. Historically, Toledo's big employers have

