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Business

Tech startup NexGen takes over state-built \$100M factory in DeWitt, begins hiring

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DeWitt, N.Y. -- NexGen Power Systems has moved into a \$100 million high-tech factory built by state taxpayers and is beginning to hire workers.

The California-based startup has moved manufacturing equipment into the 82,200-square-foot facility at 50 Collamer Crossings Parkway in DeWitt and hired 22 people.

NexGen founder, CEO and President Dinesh Ramanathan said the work force will grow to 36 in the next three months as the company fine-tunes its power transistor manufacturing equipment.

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Many of the jobs at NexGen require advanced degrees, and Ramanathan said it has not been easy finding qualified local candidates.

NexGen, however, is finding some good workers from computer chip maker GlobalFoundries, which last year laid off [455 people in Malta and Albany](#).

A little less than half of NexGen's hires have come from GlobalFoundries, and Ramanathan said he expects to hire more.

"People have been happy to move to Syracuse," he said. "That hasn't been a problem."

Ramanathan said the company expects to begin making transistors by July, then spend the next few months optimizing its production process.

In early 2020, [NexGen](#) will begin providing samples of its transistors to customers for testing in their power converters, he said, with full production scheduled to start in the third quarter (which begins July 1) of 2020.

The company has pledged to create 290 full-time, permanent jobs at the facility within seven years in exchange for up to \$15 million in grants from Empire State Development, New York's economic development arm.

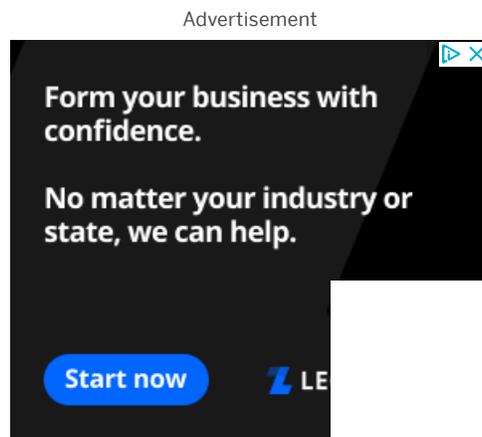
"I don't see us not being able to hit those numbers," said Ramanathan, 49, who came to the United States from India in 1992 to earn his doctorate in computer science at University of California, Irvine.

Empire State Development has provided \$7.5 million in grants to NexGen so far, and Ramanathan said he expects the total to reach \$13 million by the time the company has purchased all the equipment it needs to outfit its manufacturing lines.

NexGen will be required to pay all or a portion of the grants back to the state if it does not meet its hiring commitments.

The company is hiring equipment engineers, facility technicians, process engineers and other support personnel such as accountants and procurement specialists. Ramanathan's management team includes Chief Operations Officer Shahin Sharifzadeh, former senior vice president of worldwide operations at Atmel Corp., and Vice President of Manufacturing Rick Williamson, who has 20 years of experience in the semiconductor industry.

The facility was built at a cost of \$90 million by SUNY Polytechnic Institute's Fort Schuyler Management Corp. with the expectation of leasing it to Soraa Inc., a startup that planned to make next-generation LED products.



Soraa pulled out of the deal in 2017 before construction of the building was completed.

Empire State Development, which took over the building in the wake of the SUNY Poly corruption scandal, then reached an agreement to lease the building to NexGen.

NexGen plans to make power transistors based on gallium nitride technology, the same kind of technology that Soraa planned to use in its LED products.

Though the building was designed for Soraa, NexGen has required only three modifications to it. Two have been completed -- making its cleanroom space cleaner and reworking its cold-water system to eliminate the possibility of iron corroding NexGen's sensitive equipment.

Ramanathan said the third change -- the installation of a redundant power supply -- will be done by National Grid in July.

NexGen plans to sell its transistors to the makers of power converters for electric cars, data centers and solar power inverters. Transistors made from gallium nitride are many times more efficient than those made from silicon, allowing the power converters they go into to be smaller.

Ramanathan said NexGen recently raised \$25 million in funding from Acal, a Swiss private equity company. That should be enough to fund the company until it begins production in 2020, he said.

NexGen's headquarters remains in Santa Clara, California, where the company employs nine people. However, all its manufacturing and research and development will be done in DeWitt, Ramanathan said.

"This is where the bulk of the company is going to be," he said.

Note: Open positions at NexGen are posted online at nexgenpowersystems.com/careers/.

Rick Moriarty covers business news and consumer issues. Contact him anytime: [Email](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | 315-470-3148

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