

## Michael J. Ahearn '82

Michael Ahearn is a cleantech entrepreneur of the highest order. He was one of the first and arguably the most successful businessman to dive head first into “the largest market opportunity in the history of the planet.”<sup>1</sup> Clean technology is “any process, product, or service that reduces negative environmental impacts through significant energy efficiency improvements, the sustainable use of resources, or environmental protection activities. Clean technology includes a broad range of technology related to recycling, renewable energy, information technology, green transportation, electric motors, green chemistry, lighting, Greywater, and more.”<sup>2</sup>

### Education & Business Endeavors

Ahearn earned his BS in business at the ASU W.P. Carey School of Business in 1979,<sup>3</sup> and his JD from the ASU Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law in 1982. He practiced law with Gallagher & Kennedy<sup>4</sup> from 1986 to 1996. He founded True North Venture Partners<sup>5</sup> in 1996, “based on a belief that early stage companies seeking to disrupt socially important business sectors require a fundamentally unique approach to funding, growth and market expansion.”<sup>6</sup> He founded First Solar<sup>7</sup> in 2000. After an initial public offering in 2006, First Solar became a publicly traded company on the NASDAQ and “later became the first pure-play renewable energy company to be listed on the S&P 500.”<sup>8</sup> He was First Solar’s board chair and its first CEO and has continuously served of its board directors since 2000.

### Board Memberships & Equity Venture Capital

- Cox Enterprises, Inc.<sup>9</sup> Member Board of Directors

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<sup>1</sup> <https://endeavor.org/blog/network/alternative-energy-10-tips-when-starting-a-cleantech-company-with-mike-ahearn-and-george-bilicic-video-transcript/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clean\\_technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clean_technology)

<sup>3</sup> <https://wpcarey.asu.edu/alumni/hall-of-fame>

<sup>4</sup> <https://gknet.com/>

<sup>5</sup> “We make long term commitments to our businesses through a perpetual holding company, which is capitalized in excess of \$700 million. True North’s roots trace back to the founding and scale up of First Solar, Inc., one of the world’s leading alternative energy providers. We are leveraging that foundational experience to build a portfolio of innovative technologies and businesses that will reshape core industries and help the world transition to a clean and sustainable future. <https://www.truenorthvp.com/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://mediatech.wiki/about/Mike\\_Ahearn](https://mediatech.wiki/about/Mike_Ahearn)

<sup>7</sup> First Solar, Inc. is an American photovoltaic manufacturer of rigid thin film modules, or solar panels, and a provider of utility-scale PV power plants and supporting services that include finance, construction, maintenance and end-of-life panel recycling. <http://www.firstsolar.com/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.coxenterprises.com/about-us/corporate-leadership/board-of-directors/michael-j-ahearn>

<sup>9</sup> “Cox Enterprises, Inc. is a privately held global conglomerate headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia with approximately 55,000 employees and \$21 billion in total revenue. Its major operating subsidiaries are Cox Communications, Cox Automotive and Cox Media Group.” <https://www.coxenterprises.com/>

- Endeavor Global, Inc.<sup>10</sup> Member of Board of Directors
- Harvest Power, Inc.<sup>11</sup> Chairman
- The German Marshall Fund of the United States,<sup>12</sup> Member Board of Directors
- Thunderbird School of Global Management,<sup>13</sup> Trustee
- Black Coral Capital,<sup>14</sup> Member Board of Directors

### In His Own Words

Ahearn's company, First Solar, was one of several green technology companies called to testify before the House Sub-Committee on Regulatory Affairs, Stimulus Oversight and Government Spending in May of 2012. His sworn testimony speaks volumes about him and his company's role in American's business community.

First Solar is the lowest-cost solar module manufacturer in the industry, among the largest solar module manufacturers in the world, and the global leader in developing and constructing utility-scale photovoltaic power plants. To date, we have produced 6 gigawatts (6,000 megawatts) of solar modules, which is enough to power about three million homes and represents an estimated \$15 billion or more of solar power installations. We are headquartered in Tempe, Arizona and our global R&D and U.S. manufacturing centers are located in Perrysburg, Ohio. In addition to our 1,800 associates in the U.S., our manufacturing and project development activities support more than 7,000 additional U.S. supply chain and construction jobs. Last year, we spent more than \$1 billion with U.S. suppliers in 35 states for everything from glass to machine tools to fabricated components. We trade on the NASDAQ and

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<sup>10</sup> "Endeavor is an organization headquartered in New York City that supports entrepreneurs with potential for economic and social impact in their regions." <https://endeavor.org/>

<sup>11</sup> "Harvest Power, Inc. is a privately held organics management company headquartered in Waltham, Massachusetts that specializes in converting food waste and yard waste into biofuel, compost, mulch and fertilizer. In 2014 Fast Company named it one of the most innovative companies in the world." <http://www.harvestpower.com/>

<sup>12</sup> "The German Marshall Fund of the United States is a nonpartisan American public policy think tank and grant-making institution dedicated to promoting cooperation and understanding between North America and Europe." <http://www.gmfus.org/>

<sup>13</sup> "Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University is a global management school in Phoenix, Arizona. Founded 1946 as an independent, private institution, it was acquired by Arizona State University in 2014." <https://thunderbird.asu.edu/>

<sup>14</sup> "Black Coral Capital is a fund investing in the alternative energy / cleantech space. The fund can invest in a wide variety of cleantech." <https://starthub.org/investors/black-coral-capital>

are the only renewable energy company currently included in the S&P 500 index. First Solar's success reflects over two decades of entrepreneurial struggle, innovation and effective public-private partnership. Our core process technology – an advanced thin film semiconductor process for making low-cost solar modules – was developed in the early 1990s by a group of scientists and engineers working in partnership with the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. In 1999, we formed First Solar and committed venture capital funding to commercialize the manufacturing process. A project that we thought would require two years and \$40 million ended up requiring six years and over \$100 million as we encountered and eventually solved a number of problems typical of start-up technology companies.<sup>15</sup>

Thomas Edison famously said, “We are like tenant farmers chopping down the fence around our house for fuel when we should be using Nature’s inexhaustible sources of energy -- sun, wind and tide. . . I'd put my money on the sun and solar energy. What a source of power! I hope we don't have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that.”<sup>16</sup>

Every law school should have a graduate, many graduates, like Michael Ahearn.

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<sup>15</sup> : <https://republicans-oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/5-16-12-RegAffairs-Ahearn.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Edison, attributed, “Uncommon Friends: Life with Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, Alexis Carrel & Charles Lindbergh.” [http://www.notable-quotes.com/s/solar\\_power\\_quotes.html](http://www.notable-quotes.com/s/solar_power_quotes.html)