

## GEF SCORES IMPRESSIVE GAINS FROM UNIRAC SALE

BY MATT MILLER

Green-investing pioneer Global Environment Fund expects a rich 14 times payback from the sale of solar energy components company Unirac Inc. to European construction products and systems combine Hilti Corp.

The transaction, announced Tuesday, is another example of the growing appeal of cleantech in general and solar energy-related companies in particular in the M&A marketplace.

While transaction details weren't released, it's understood that Hilti paid approximately \$140 million, according to a source. That suggests an \$8 million investment in 2006 by GEF, which owned about 80% of Unirac.

"It's one of the highest-returning deals in the sector — a phenomenal return, not only in cleantech," said Michael Molnar, a partner at **Greentech Capital Advisors, LLC**, which acted as financial advisor to Unirac. "I think you'll see more of these in the future," Molnar added.

Unirac, based in Albuquerque, N.M., makes mounting systems for photovoltaic solar cell arrays. GEF managing director Lisa Schule said in a press release that Unirac's revenue has grown approximately 55% a year since her firm acquired a controlling interest in the company. Unirac was founded in 1999.

Based in Schaan, Liechtenstein, Hilti is best known for its extensive line of power tools. This is its first foray into the industry that surrounds alternative energy.

"It's another example of a large corporate either getting involved

in cleantech or furthering involvement in cleantech through M&A," Molnar said.

The Unirac acquisition represents the fourth solidly midmarket, solar-related deal in the past half-year, but the first related to photovoltaics. The biggest took place in October, when Siemens AG spent \$418 million for an Israeli solar thermal power company, Solel Solar Systems Ltd. In late March, Silicon Valley's SunPower Corp. paid \$277 million for another solar power plant concern, Malta's SunRay Renewable Energy Ltd. In February, Areva SA, a French nuclear concern, bought another Silicon Valley company, Ausra Inc., for an undisclosed price, thought to be between \$200 million and \$300 million.

Thermal technology uses sunlight to heat water, which generates electricity. Photovoltaic, or PV, technology converts sunlight into electricity through cell arrays. These are smaller — think rooftop installations — than solar thermal systems but are much more widespread.

Unirac gives Hilti entrée to the solar energy industry. In turn, Hilti gives Unirac corporate heft and a well-established distribution channel. Hilti's reach in Europe and beyond could be especially useful for Unirac, Molnar said. Europe's solar industry is far more developed than that in the U.S. Germany, alone, has about 4 times the installed capacity in solar power than the entire U.S.

Founded in 1990, GEF is a pioneer in environment-related PE. The Chevy Chase, Md.-based firm has approximately \$1 billion under management.

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