

PEOPLE

Andrew McCalla

Founder
Meridian Solar

When Andrew McCalla founded Meridian Solar 10 years ago in his grandmother's garage, his motivation didn't come from thinking the solar industry would be huge – rather that he thought it should be huge.

"I'm not an either/or [person]. I think there will be a place for everything," McCalla said of his thoughts on future energy sources and diversity. "I think our real solution to energy problems is efficiency, no matter where it comes from."

A decade later, solar is indeed becoming huge, and Meridian in turn has played a role in helping solar systems crop up in Texas and beyond.

The company has celebrated its 10-year anniversary and recently garnered attention for the solar panels it installed at H.E. Butt Grocery Co.'s store on Brodie Lane. Meridian is also behind the installation the well-known solar electric system at Applied Materials' huge Austin campus. McCalla said he sees exponential growth in the future, both for the company – which in a decade has grown from one full time employee to 35 – and in the industry.

What was your first job?

That depends on the definition. Grubbing roots at a ranch in South Texas, selling blowguns, summer camp counselor ... probably one of those. I've only really had one career though: solar electric system design and installation.

What's the toughest part about starting a business?

Nothing's too tough if you are passionate about your pursuit.

Are you a native Texan?

I am. My grandfather was Reuben Hornsby, the first Anglo settler in present-day Travis County. If we count him, which he would probably argue we should, I am a seventh-generation Texan.

What kind of boss are you?

I'm not sure if I am the right guy to ask; but I prefer to say that people work with me, not for me.

What's your worst habit?

Trying to do too much.

What motivates you?

Passion for solar electric technology and my family ... not always in that order.

What really annoys you?

Abuse of the defenseless.

What's the best invention of the last 50 years?

I think it is too soon to tell.

What's something not many people know about you?

I'm a pilot.

What are you most afraid of?

That humanity will never learn to care properly for its

habitat; but I think we'll be alright.

Do you consider yourself an advice giver or advice seeker?

Too much the former and not enough the latter.

What's the latest movie you've seen?

"Up"

What fascinates you?

The natural world.

What revolts you?

The insult humanity can inflict upon it.

Where is your favorite vacation spot?

Vacation?

Talk radio or music in the car?

Whatever they are serving up on KUT.

What's your favorite thing about Austin?

It's home.

What's your least favorite?

It's home to too many.

What's been your biggest accomplishment so far?

Meridian Solar, getting married and having two wonderful children ... now what?

What led you to start a solar company 10 years ago, which in this industry seems like quite a long time ago?

I had been working at a solar electric company that was designing top-quality systems with top-quality components, but since we didn't install the systems, and since it was a relatively new technology, the quality of the installations of those systems was suffering ... and creating problems. I decided that if the technology was to proliferate as I thought it should, Texas needed a company that would offer all three aspects (design, specification, and installation) under one roof.

Do you think Austin's solar and cleantech industry will continue to grow?

Indeed. I am completely confident that it will.

What needs to occur to make that happen?

It's happening. Energy sources will increasingly reflect their true costs, and those costs (financial, environmental, quality of life, political, etc.) will foster increased awareness and adoption of solar and other clean technologies. That being said, it will grow far more significantly, and faster, with improved and appropriate leadership, support, and regulation from our municipal, utility, state and federal officials.

■ Interview by Kate Harrington



NICK SIMONITE

WHAT OTHERS SAY

What was your first impression of Andrew?

I remember thinking of him as one of the most enthusiastic and committed young guys I'd seen getting into the industry at the time.



Russel Smith
Executive director
Texas Renewable Energy Industries Association