

FORT WORTH

Solar streetlight maker opens U.S. HQ

France-based firm aims to lower energy costs, and not tap grid

By **BOB FRANCIS**
fortworthreport.org

Donning the requisite cowboy hats to cut the ribbon opening their new U.S. headquarters, leaders of Agen, France-based Fonroche Lighting welcomed visitors to the solar streetlight company's new U.S. headquarters in Fort Worth on Wednesday.

Despite sporting chapeaux from the 19th century, the company leaders say they are anything but old fashioned. Fonroche is the global leader in autonomous solar streetlights aiming to lower energy costs by

eliminating the need for grid connections. The city of Fort Worth has recently invested millions of federal dollars into solar light installations.

"If Thomas Edison came back today, he'd say, 'Hey, look, you're doing things the same way we did 100 years ago,'" said Hocine Benaoum, CEO for Fonroche Lighting America. The company expanded to the U.S. in 2019, opening a U.S. headquarters first in Boston before relocating to Fort Worth in 2023.

Fort Worth was the right choice, said Laurent Lubrano, CEO and co-founder of the company, who was in town for the grand opening of the new 20,088-square-foot space within Empire Holdings' 12.14-acre

master-planned Campus Industrial Park development at 2224 SE Loop 820 in southeast Fort Worth.

"It was the right place to be logistically," he said. "But it was also right because of the welcome we got here."

Benaoum said Fort Worth leaders quickly embraced the company's vision to reshape urban infrastructure with renewable energy solutions.

"They got it," he said. "They had the right attitude. We knew we wanted to work with them."

Benaoum was also sold on the work ethic of the employees in Fort Worth.

"It's been a great experience for us," he said. The company expects to have about 30 employees by the end of the year in their

new facility and is already thinking about expansion.

Fonroche Lighting America has its solar-powered streetlights installed in more than 1,000 municipalities across 43 states and is making inroads around the state and the country, said Benaoum. Unlike conventional streetlights, the company's solar lighting solutions don't require trenches, cables or electrical connections. The lights are also less expensive to maintain than conventional lighting, he said.

"That makes them very attractive to companies, cities and other groups installing infrastructure," Benaoum said.

On display outside the new building are examples of current street lighting systems with

nearby examples of Fonroche Lighting products.

"It's very easy to see the difference, but still it takes time to change the way things have been done for over 100 years," he said.

Like many of Empire's warehouses, the new headquarters features modern amenities of Class A office space along with warehouse space and customized elements for Fonroche's engineering, sales and production departments.

"Our priority is building spaces that fuel tenant success," said Bowie Holland, president of Empire Holdings. Benaoum said the company knew they had to have a place where employees wanted to be at work every day.

"You can't just put people in a

barren warehouse now with nothing else. That doesn't work anymore. You have to give them a place to be proud of, a place they want to come to every day," said Benaoum.

Fonroche Lighting was founded in 2011 and opened in the U.S. in 2019. In 2023, the company partnered with its home city of Agen to install 6,000 commercial solar streetlights by 2026, the largest deployment of solar streetlight systems in Europe. Several of the company's streetlights are or will soon be installed in Fort Worth.

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TARRANT COUNTY



2015 File Photo/Staff

Pete Bonds, owner and General Manager of Bonds Ranch, is the second generation to run the ranch. It's gotten harder to manage as Fort Worth's growth has crept ever closer to his pastures, he says.

‘Just like Dallas’

Many worry that new development threatens rustic charm

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Fort Worth's past, present and future can all be seen along the roughly 8 mile stretch of Bonds Ranch Road.

The nearly 30-year-old span in far north Fort Worth is awash in rolling green pastures cut up by railroad tracks and pockmarked with an ever-growing number of housing and commercial developments.

Angus and Herefords graze in fields next to large manor homes on 1-acre lots. Gas well pads sit next to stacked subdivisions where residents are in spitting distance from their neighbors.

The two-lane country roads that used to connect farmers to markets now connect students to classrooms and commuters to jobs as 59 people per day move to Fort Worth, one of the fastest growing big cities in the nation.

Roughly 4,500 homes and apartment units are in the pipeline for Bonds Ranch Road.

A new Kroger Marketplace at the intersection of U.S. 287 will bring much needed amenities to an area where grocery runs are at the mercy of freeway traffic and freight train schedules.

Some residents fear the new development is ruining the quiet country lifestyle that attracted them to the area in the first place, while others have resigned themselves to the idea that Fort Worth's growth will eventually envelop the prairies that nurtured the city's cowboy heritage.

What's coming?

The two biggest developments are on the western edge of the corridor.

The Rio Claro development will bring 1,914 homes southeast of the intersection of Bonds Ranch Road and Morris Dido Newark Road.

Across the street from Rio Claro, Dallas-based Centurion American Development Group plans to build 1,100 homes across 836 acres. The developer inked a deal with Tarrant County in April 2024 to set up a special taxing district to fund construction of streets, sewers and sidewalks.

On the east end of Bonds Ranch Road, Inspire homes plans 196 single-family

homes just west of the Harmon Road roundabout. The homes will be rentals and are expected to be ready for move-ins this year, according to the project's website.

Pulte Homes is building 151 single-family homes at the intersection of Bonds Ranch and Willow Springs roads. They'll range in size from 1,900 to 3,800 square feet, and range in price from \$408,000 to \$534,000, according to the developer.

The Fort Worth City Council approved a rezoning in May for a 400-unit apartment complex just east of the intersection of Bonds Ranch Road and U.S. 287. That complex will also include ground floor commercial space similar to the developments near the Tom Thumb and Target stores on West Seventh Street.

On the southeast corner of Bonds Ranch and Blue Mound roads, Dallas-based developer HPI is building 193 single-family rental homes and 636 apartments.

Proximity to jobs and good schools makes the area around Bonds Ranch Road attractive for developers, said Matt Mildren, a partner at PMB Capital Investments, the Dallas-based company behind the Rio Claro development.

The recently opened Eagle Mountain High School at 3451 Bonds Ranch Road and the proximity to Eagle Mountain Lake are also amenities that make the area a draw for both development and new residents, he said.

Cramming people in?

Kelly Bushway has lived in the Fossil Creek Estates neighborhood near Wagley Robertson and Bonds Ranch roads for six years.

Part of what attracted her to the area were the large lots and the rural lifestyle. Developers told her neighbors that the area would stay that way because of the challenges of building subdivisions along a two-lane country road bounded by railroad crossings.

"When I think of Fort Worth, I think of the Stockyards. I think of people who ride horses and live their lives outdoors," Bushway said. "Now they're making it just like

Dallas and trying to cram in as many people as possible."

Bonds Ranch Road is already overmatched when it comes to flooding and traffic. Cars regularly back up onto U.S. 287 during evening rush hour, and a section between that freeway and BNSF Railway floods during heavy rain.

‘That's the way it is’

The actual Bonds Ranch — for which the road is named — has been around since 1933. Nocona native and World War I veteran Bob "P.R." Bonds bought 5,000 acres near Saginaw. With the help of ranch manager Pete Burnett, he built a business into an empire that has pastures in 26 Texas counties and 13 states.

Current owner and general manager Pete Bonds is the second generation to run the ranch. It's gotten harder to manage as Fort Worth's growth has crept ever closer to his pastures, he said.

Cowboys used to be able to move cattle across the country roads without an escort. Now they need a Tarrant County sheriff to come out and manage traffic, Bonds said.

While the ranch has had concerns with nearby residents lighting fireworks next to their fields, Bonds said that's something the city of Fort Worth can control with better enforcement.

He said the encroachment is just a natural part of Fort Worth's growth.

"The land's got to go to the highest and best use, and people are a better use of land than cattle," Bonds said. "As long as Texas remains popular, people are going to keep coming."

Fort Worth is doing a good job of keeping the cowboy culture alive in the Stockyards, but even there you don't see cowboys anymore — only tourists, he said.

There may be a time when there isn't a Bonds Ranch on Bonds Ranch Road, but Bonds said his family can easily take the money from selling the land and go ranch elsewhere.

"We've all moved, and we've all changed, and it's just a matter of economics," he said. "You may not love it, but that's the way it is."

SUPER BOWL LIX

Bud Light teases Post Malone ad

Singer appears in commercial standing on porch with beers

By **UWA EDE-OSIFO**
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Super Bowl LIX is two weeks away, but the fanfare around ads for the league championship game is in full throttle.

Bud Light teased a commercial on Thursday starring Grapevine-raised singer Post Malone and comedian Shane Gillis.

In a 24-second clip posted to Bud Light's X account, Malone and Gillis stand on a porch holding some beers.

"Come on! Let us in!" the duo pleads with a security camera. Gillis then gets a text that Malone reads. "Oh, they're out back," Malone says. He and Gillis then head in that direction.

Malone's Super Bowl commercial debut was with the Anheuser-Busch brand in 2020.

He told *People* then, "I f---ing love Bud Light so much. I've been drinking it since the legal age of 21," also saying, "I never thought I'd be in a commercial, but I guess people wanted me to be in a commercial, so I'll be in a commercial."

Bud Light has had a tumultuous few years. The brand suffered a drop in sales after a 2023 sponsored post from transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney led some conservatives to boycott its drinks. Some LGBTQ advocates were also critical of Bud Light, saying it caved to political pressure instead of standing with their community.

In a return to a safe strategy,



File Photo/The Associated Press

Post Malone will be in Bud Light's Super Bowl LIX ad with comedian Shane Gillis. Malone has said that he's been drinking Bud Light since he was of legal age.

the brand tapped Malone, Peyton Manning and the so-called Bud Light Genie for a Super Bowl ad last February. Its woes continued, however, as it fell to third place in U.S. beer sales last summer and was supplanted by Michelob Ultra as the No. 1 tap beer in America in November.

In the comment section for Thursday's X post, users seemed to approve of the latest ad.

"I'd let them in if they showed up at my door! Let's party," one account wrote.

"Yay now I have a reason to watch the #SuperBowl!," another said, echoing a common refrain that some viewers enjoy the commercials more than the actual sporting event.

Malone will also come to New Orleans, where this year's Super Bowl is taking place, to perform a free show sponsored by Bud Light on Feb. 7, two days before the big game.

DALLAS POLICE

Officer arrested one day after promotion

By **CHASE ROGERS**
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A Dallas police officer, promoted just a day earlier, was arrested Saturday and is facing a public intoxication charge, police said.

Sr. Cpl. Issac Burton was placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of an internal affairs investigation, according to a news release.

It was not immediately clear whether Burton had an attorney.

A police spokesperson declined to provide additional information about the arrest, including the time and location.

"What's in the release is all the information currently

available," Corbin Robinson, the police spokesperson, said in a statement.

Under the Texas Penal Code, a person can be charged with public intoxication if they appear in a public place while "intoxicated to the degree that the person may endanger the person or another."

Burton joined the police department in July 2019 and is assigned to the community operations division.

Hours before his arrest, Burton was one of more than 170 officers promoted within the department during a Friday ceremony at Concord Church. He was promoted to Sr. Cpl.

Staff Writer Kelli Smith contributed to this report.