

Mission: Space jobs for the Springs

by Amy Gillentine

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The growth of the space industry in Colorado Springs might be the best-kept secret in town.

Everyone's familiar with the Air Force Space Command. But few people realize, for instance, that NASA's deep-space equipment — including the Mars Rover — is monitored by ITT Systems on Powers Boulevard.

Boeing Corp., meanwhile, is working on missile defense technology at Schriever Air Force Base, among other locations. And did you know that CSC Corp., also on Powers, provides software for satellites, space and missile defense systems and other IT?

Altogether, there are roughly 10,350 people who work for 90 companies throughout the city in the business of, well,

boldly going where no one has gone before. Another 18,000 are military personnel assigned to space-related missions.

The industry hasn't been totally immune from layoffs and cutbacks but ITT, Boeing, CSC and others in the sector have generally only been hiring in the Springs.

While local figures aren't available, the Colorado Space Coalition reported jobs in the sector statewide grew 13.1 percent from 2004 to 2009.

"It's a robust industry in the midst of the recession," said Elliot Pulham, executive director of the Space Foundation, a Colorado Springs nonprofit that focuses on the global space industry. "It's what every city dreams of having — and we have a pretty big share here."

How big? During the next five years, the space industry will have a \$4.5 billion impact on the Colorado Springs economy, according to the local Economic Development Corp.

The Space Foundation does its part to help shine a spotlight of the space industry every year during the annual Space Symposium, billed as the largest such gathering in the world. More than 8,000 professionals — from astronauts to engineers — will be at this year's event at the Broadmoor April 12-16. The four-day event features White House decision makers, policy analysts and industry experts.

The event itself generates as much as \$25 million in business activity, as well as highlighting Colorado Springs' role in the space industry.

"We have a big growth opportunity here," Pulham said. "As NASA's role changes (from manned space flight to research and development), it means more commercialization of space, more companies entering different areas."

Company growth

ITT Systems is going after those opportunities, said B.J. Talley, marketing director for the company. ITT has two divisions, and Colorado Springs serves as headquarters for its services division, with about 800 people on its local payroll.

Thanks to the military's presence, "there's a deep labor pool here," he said. "We often hire people here, and then send them to California or Florida to work on specific projects."

Beyond software, the company also designs cameras and other devices used in outer space. Colorado Springs serves as the company's lead offices for its climate and environmental work, weather-mapping and ground-to-space range services.

CSC, meanwhile, has 400 employees in the city, most of whom work with the space industry, said Gayle White, director of engineering solutions and technology. With more than two decades in the space industry, he's seen the sector grow in the Springs and believes it should continue to develop.

"From my vantage point, the space future in Colorado Springs depends on our ability to attract companies involved in the mission," he said. "There's no reason that some of the work being done elsewhere can't be done here."

CSC is a global company with revenues of \$16 billion. Its 2009 public-sector revenue — which includes work done by its Colorado Springs operation — was \$6 billion.

Low profile, big opportunity

There's no mystery about why the space industry has such a low profile in the city. Most companies simply choose to stay under the radar.

"It's sort of under-appreciated in the city," Pulham said. "But these are established companies, paying higher-than-averages wages, with a highly technical, highly educated workforce."

Brian Binn, president of the military affairs division of the Colorado Springs Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber understands the importance of the sector.

"Our military mission is vitally important. We have to grow it for the future of our economy," he said. "And hand-in-hand with that is aerospace defense."

There's a nice-sized base to build on.

About 23 percent of the state's private-sector space employees work in El Paso County, with average salaries between \$84,390 and \$99,050.

The state is now second in the nation for space-industry jobs, behind California. Payroll for the state's space industry amounted to \$2.8 billion last year.

The Colorado Space Coalition promotes space industry throughout the state. According to its figures, there were 120 private aerospace companies in the state in 2009, a growth of 5.1 percent from 2004.

While the future seems promising, Pulham warns competition is heating up for the United States. Much of the manufacturing for the industry is done overseas, and Europe has now surpassed the nation in launching commercial satellites.

"It used to be, back in the 1980s and '90s, the U.S. was launching 80 percent of the satellites," he said. "Now we're launching 20 percent."

That could change under President Obama's budget, which mandates that NASA become more of a research operation — moving away from manned flights and more toward unmanned projects such as the Hubble Telescope and the Mars Rover projects.

That move means that space could become more commercialized, an opportunity for private businesses to get into the business of manned flights and more.

"We're a little bamboozled about what comes next," Pulham said. "And that's a big focus of the (Space) Symposium. Companies are going to be talking about what this means for them, and what it means for the government."

And, of course, what it could mean for jobs in the Springs' growing space industry.

Coming up

What: The 26th Annual Space Symposium

Where: The Broadmoor

When: April 12-16

Who: More than 8,000 space industry professionals from around the globe

Colorado's space industry at a glance

Direct employment: 25,870 statewide

Five-year growth: 13.1 percent

Concentration of jobs statewide: 1.2 percent, compared to 0.3 percent nationally

No. of space-related companies in the Springs: About 90

No. of people employed by those companies: About 10,350

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