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BUSINESS

Tucson space-products firm bringing business down to Earth

By Jack Gillum

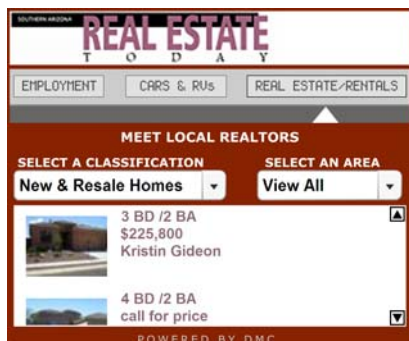
ARIZONA DAILY STAR

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Tucson-based Paragon Space Development Corp. makes radiators and plumbing equipment for the Orion spacecraft in the Constellation program, which NASA will use for its human-spaceflight missions when the space shuttle is retired in the next decade.

The company, which recently opened an office in Washington, D.C., specializes in life-support systems. But it also is looking for new markets other than those for NASA and the space program.

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out there in space, we make sure the components won't get too hot or too cold. In space, you have to radiate heat away, in much the same way you feel heat radiate from a fire.

We're also working on the ducting and plumbing of the Orion craft. It turns out to be an incredibly difficult job to plumb the spacecraft and have all those pipes go to the right places — with almost 400 connections.

Q: Outside of Constellation and Orion, what are some key products that Paragon is developing?

A: One of the products is a contaminated-water-diving system that we developed for the Navy that we're soon going to commercialize. We looked at how spacesuits work and asked, "Can we make a diving system that can really isolate the diver from contaminated water they're in?"

Diving systems are designed with the idea that seawater is safe, but even the full diving suits never made a full barrier. With things like the USS Cole bombing (in Yemen), where divers are working in diesel tanks, the divers are working around many solvents.

And the hazmat diving suit is one of Popular Mechanics' inventions of the year. We're working with the Navy for a final series of tests, so it will be part of the Navy's diving equipment.

Q: What does Paragon's new office in Washington, D.C., mean for the company's growth?

A: We kept on finding ourselves flying to Washington for one reason or another. But we needed to go and maintain relationships at NASA headquarters or see a customer on the East Coast. Part of it was proximity. We had an opportunity with an executive, (Chief Strategic Officer) Lance Bush, wanting to move to D.C. Nothing beats a handshake.

Q: What other markets is Paragon pursuing?

Paragon CEO Taber MacCallum, a former Biosphere 2 crew member, spoke with the Arizona Daily Star this week about how a Tucson company is involved in the next generation of spaceflight, and what the prospects are for Paragon's spacesuit applications here on Earth.

Q: What type of work goes into the Constellation program?

A: We're supporting the overall thermal design of the spacecraft. That means when it's

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Christie Iacomini, Paragon's director of research and development programs, reviews some data on radiators with colleague Phillip Benjamin. The company makes radiators for the Orion spacecraft.

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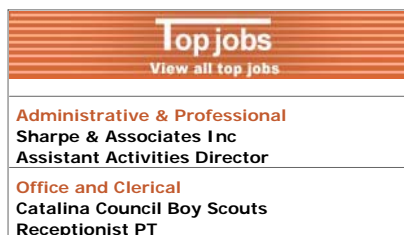
ABOUT PARAGON CORP.

Paragon Space Development Corp.

- Founded: 1993
- Address: 3481 E. Michigan St.
- CEO: Taber MacCallum, 44
- Employees: 50
- 2007 revenue: \$6 million

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A: We do a lot of future technology, such as electrolyzing carbon dioxide to make oxygen. We don't really have a good way to produce all of the crew's oxygen without some other consumable. This new method can produce all the needed oxygen for the crew, and it allows for long spaceflight or (space) bases.

We also look at the extreme environments that people work on here on Earth. Are there things we can design that make firefighting safe, for example, such as reducing their exposure to pollutants in a burning building?

Q: Why would a space-development company such as Paragon stay and grow in Southern Arizona?

A: Because it's a wonderful state. One of the main reasons we're here is because of Biosphere 2, mostly by legacy. It's also because the University of Arizona is a world-class research institution. Raytheon (Missile Systems) helps create and support industry in Tucson. And we're in a good location, with a radius to customers in Denver, Houston and Los Angeles. It's an attractive place for people to move to.

- Contact reporter Jack Gillum at 573-4178 or at jgillum@azstarnet.com.



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