

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

Goleta marine technology company announces \$76M contract : L-3 MariPro to build ocean observing system for University of Washington

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November 10, 2009 9:51 AM

A Goleta company is making waves in the world of ocean science.

L-3 MariPro, a worldwide corporation specializing in marine technology, on Monday announced a \$76 million contract — the single largest ever for the local business unit — to build an ocean observing system for the University of Washington. UW awarded the contract to the company, which employs 100 people on the South Coast. The contract promises not only to create about a dozen new jobs, but it's also critical in helping retain the current workforce, said a company official.

Company managers, UW representatives and a Goleta city official marked the kickoff of the Regional Scale Nodes (RSN) project at the Beachside Cafe in Goleta. It was a choice setting for the launch, with the roar of the ocean in the background, seabirds darting over the waves and dolphins frolicking in the surf.

Several L-3 MariPro staff members even donned the familiar purple and gold Huskies ballcaps as a tribute to their new customer.

During the next three years, company employees will build a device that will be installed on the seabed in the Straits of Juan de Fuca. The project, which carries a total pricetag of \$126 million, is funded by the National Science Foundation, which includes taxpayer money courtesy of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"Ecstatic doesn't begin to describe it," said Dan Chabot, vice president of business operations for the L-3 MariPro, talking about the successful contract bid, which has been two years in the making. Mr. Chabot said the company "was engaged in strategic research and development with this project in mind."



Dr. John Delaney, of the University of Washington, hailed the collaboration between the institution and L-3 MariPro at a Monday kickoff ceremony.
STEVE MALONE/NEWS-PRESS PHOTOS



Dan Chabot, vice president of business operations at L-3 MariPro, said the UW contract is the largest ever received by the Goleta company.

He expected other subcontractors in California will also benefit from the contract, such as fiber optic cable manufacturers.

"We considered other vendors, but these guys outshined everyone with their proposal," said John Delaney, Ph.D., program director and principal investigator for the nodes program at UW, which is connected to the Ocean Observatories Initiative, a collaboration of 62 organizations. Dr. Delaney has been a passionate advocate for launching next-generation ocean science and educational capabilities for decades. He described the nodes project as a "remote science lab with hundreds of robots, thousands of sensors and huge bandwidth" connected to one of the world's premier research universities in probably the highest-tech city on earth: Seattle, Washington.

He expects data will start flowing from the ocean floor by 2013. RSN will help scientists better understand how to monitor the changing climate, migration of major fish stocks, tsunamis and undersea earthquakes, Dr. Delaney said.

"We'll be developing the infrastructure so they can do the science," said Mr. Chabot of the enclosure, which will be built at the company's 68,000 square-foot facility at 1522 Cook Place, near the airport.

While L-3 MariPro is building the hardware, it must also dovetail with sensors and monitoring equipment provided by other vendors. As such, a team of mechanical, electrical and marine engineers must ensure its integrity as it houses so much technologically advanced software, said Mr. Chabot, adding the node has to survive the air-water interface as it makes its way to the sea floor.

As the technology for the multi-year project advances, Mr. Chabot expects additional customers for the nodes, such as nations engaged in ocean science research.

While the new science is a positive benefit to the local economy, the nodes project should be old hat for engineering and manufacturing staff at L-3 MariPro, which has operated under various owners since the early 1960s. Over the years, employees have designed, manufactured and installed long-life underwater acoustic and electromagnetic sensors systems used by the world's navies for submarine training and tracking exercises and surveillance.

A local official hailed the contract as a positive step in creating jobs and advancing research and innovation on the South Coast. "The City of Goleta is happy to celebrate your business success," said Eric Onnen, a city councilman representing the city. While the work the company is doing may not be on everyone's radar, "the depth and breadth is significant," said Mr. Onnen. "You're providing the kinds of jobs we see as a mainstay of our (economic) future."

In terms of employment, Mr. Chabot said he already has made an offer to a candidate, with about nine more slots to fill in the immediate future. "But the greatest benefit is the jobs retention and career development" this contract brings to the current workforce, he added.



With the Pacific in the background, Eric Onnen, mayor pro tempore for the City of Goleta, lauded the new contract, which will culminate in the manufacturing of an ocean observing system.