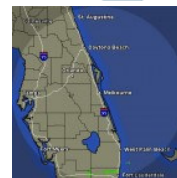




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New rocket could bring jobs

Seed money would help fund freighter service

BY TODD HALVORSON
FLORIDA TODAY

CAPE CANAVERAL - NASA's shuttle booster manufacturer will unveil a new rocket today that it aims to launch from Cape Canaveral as part of an enterprise that could bring about 350 jobs to Florida.

The venture could pump more than \$300 million into the state's economy in the next eight years -- a time when up to 3,500 jobs likely are to be lost as a result of the shutdown of NASA's shuttle fleet.

"This is very significant for Florida," said Joel Crook, director of advanced planning for Alliant Techsystems (ATK) of Edina, Minn., the world's largest producer of solid rocket motors.

"I think it's very significant to retain a lot of the existing jobs, and there is also the potential for some new jobs. Our intention is to be able to use as much of the existing shuttle infrastructure and people to support this vehicle as possible."

ATK and Lockheed Martin were enlisted by Chicago-based startup PlanetSpace Inc., forming one of several teams vying for \$175 million now up for grabs from NASA.

The seed money is meant to spur development of a private U.S. system to launch cargo and astronaut crews to the International Space Station after the shuttles retire in 2010.

PlanetSpace Chief Executive Chirinjeev Kathuria likened it to the 1925 federal government push to stimulate an infant aviation industry by awarding commercial contracts for U.S. Air Mail service.

In August 2006, NASA split about \$500 million between SpaceX of El Segundo, Calif., and Oklahoma-based Rocketplane Kistler in the opening round of its Commercial Orbital Transportation Services program.

SpaceX plans to launch Falcon rockets from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station's launch

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Bidding war. Alliant Techsystems, which is bidding for the \$175 million of NASA seed money for new rockets, also won a \$1.8 billion contract in August for the first stage of Ares, above. NASA

WEB EXTRAS

Space Blog: The Flame Trench

New rocket

The new Alliant Techsystems rocket is a Delta 2-class launch vehicle that also could loft commercial communications satellites as well as military payloads and NASA science and planetary probes. Its payload capabilities are:

- Up to 14,795 pounds to the International Space Station
- Up to 6,160 pounds to Geostationary Transfer Orbit (the realm of most commercial communications satellites)
- Up to 4,147 on moon missions
- Up to 2,992 on missions to Mars

Bidding for money

PlanetSpace is one of at least a half-dozen bidders for \$175 million in NASA seed money aimed at spurring development of U.S. commercial cargo and crew transport services to the International Space Station. Among the others:

- Transformational Space Co. of Virginia would develop a cargo capsule that would be hurled into orbit by air-launched rocket.
- SpaceDev of Poway, Calif. is offering to develop a mini-shuttle spaceplane that would be launched on a United Launch Alliance Atlas 5 or a NASA Ares 1.
- Spacehab Inc. of Texas is developing a cargo carrier that would be launched on United Launch Alliance Atlas 5 or Delta 4 rockets.

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complex 40. A demonstration flight is planned late this year.

- Space Systems/Loral, of California is offering a space tug that would stay in orbit and guide cargo carriers to the station.

Rocketplane Kistler missed several NASA deadlines, and the agency cut off its seed money in October, reopening competition for the remaining \$175 million. PlanetSpace is one of at least six bidders. NASA plans to pick a winner in February.

The company has secured \$50 million in commitments from Canadian state and provincial governments, Kathuria said.

Another \$200 million in private equity and debt commitments also have been obtained, he added.

The NASA seed money would help the company raise estimated development costs for the space freighter service.

"Our development costs -- including our entire space transportation system and ground infrastructure -- is less than \$500 million," said Kathuria, a millionaire who made his fortune in wireless Internet and diagnostic medical imaging.

Gregory Kehrl, advanced program integration manager with Lockheed Martin, said the financial backing was critical to the decision to team with PlanetSpace.

"The ability of PlanetSpace to secure rock-solid financing gave us great confidence," Kehrl said. "We have great confidence in their ability to raise the required finances and keep everything rolling smoothly."

PlanetSpace recruited Lockheed Martin for orbital transport vehicles that could haul cargo and ultimately crews to the space station.

Alliant Techsystems today will divulge plans for a three-stage rocket based on NASA's shuttle and unmanned Athena and Taurus launch vehicles.

The shuttle's solid rocket boosters consist of four segments.

The planned first stage of the new booster would be equal to 2 1/2 of the shuttle's segments.

The second stage would be a Castor 120 solid rocket motor flown on Athena 1, Athena 2 and Taurus launch vehicles.

The third stage would be a Castor 30 rocket motor the company is developing.

It would be topped by a Lockheed Martin module that would guide cargo or crew carriers to the station.

The lineage of the unnamed rocket should give the PlanetSpace team an edge, Crook said.

The company plans to launch a small version of the rocket by 2009. A demonstration flight of the full-size vehicle is scheduled for late 2010.

PlanetSpace is scouting office locations in Brevard County.

The local operations center is expected to have employment of 140 by mid-2010.

Total statewide employment, including suppliers and other contractors, is projected at 346 people.

The projected economic impact on Florida through 2016 is \$313 million.

Space Florida, an organization created by the state Legislature to promote and develop the aerospace industry, is working with PlanetSpace as well as other companies competing for the NASA money.

Officials there say a new commercial launch services business would be a welcome addition to the Space Coast.

"Any and all businesses that we are able to help come here and employ people and use these facilities, it's all great for the state of Florida," Space Florida spokeswoman Deborah Spicer said.

Contact Halvorson at 639-0576 or halvorson@floridatoday.com.

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