

Firm earns funding for smart city efforts

■ ProStar out to make Grand Junction model for utility management



Carey Wheeler, geospatial intelligence specialist at ProStar Geocorp demonstrates a display of flood plains in Grand Junction. Information can be used in modeling to help respond to natural disasters.
(Photo by Phil Castle)

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A business executive expects to use a \$250,000 grant to further efforts to make Grand Junction a model for more precisely locating and managing underground utilities.

“At the end of the day, it’s about developing better information so people can make better decisions,” said Page Tucker, president and chief executive officer of ProStar Geocorp.

The Grand Junction company was among 15 recipients of a total of more than \$3.2 million in grants awarded by the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade through the Advanced Industries Accelerator Program.

The program promotes advanced industries in the state by increasing access to capital, accelerating commercialization, encouraging public-private partnerships and creating infrastructure. Early stage capital grants offer funding to companies creating products and services that can be manufactured in Colorado and exported globally.



Page Tucker, CEO ProStar Geocorp

ProStar Geocorp also received a \$250,000 grant in 2016. Mountain Racing Products, a bicycle components manufacturer in Grand Junction, was awarded \$250,000 through the program earlier this year.

Tucker said ProStar will use its latest grant to fund additional efforts in a pilot project with the City of Grand Junction to use the software and services the company has developed to more precisely locate water and sewer lines, natural gas lines, power lines and other buried utilities. That information then can be used in taking a more proactive approach to everything from maintenance and planning to responding to natural disasters, he said.

The effort also fits into his business plan to diversify the products and services ProStar initially developed for the energy industry to serve other markets, including municipalities.

ProStar Geocorp combines geographic information systems and data to offer computer software and services that help

customers manage infrastructure, whether it’s displaying, collecting, storing or using information about the location of pipelines, fiber optic cables or other facilities. ProStar Geocorp has worked to develop a niche market for what are known in the energy sector as midstream companies that transport oil, natural gas and other products.

The same technology also can be used to make smart cities even smarter, Tucker said.

In Grand Junction, ProStar has joined in a pilot project to compile and display information about buried utilities. Different utilities maintain records about the locations of underground utilities, but are sometimes reluctant to share information, Tucker said. It's a question of storing information in way that can be shared, but also remains secure. ProStar offers expertise in just that, he said.

The City of Grand Junction as well as the Colorado Department of Transportation and Colorado 811 utility location and notification service have joined in the effort, Tucker said. He said he hopes other utilities also will collaborate.

ProStar can provide information not only on computers, but also smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices that can be used in the field, he says.

In locating underground pipes or utilities based on records, there could be differences between where records indicate utilities were installed and where they actually exist. Using ProStar systems and equipment, workers can update records as utilities are located, Tucker said.

ProStar has added to its capabilities in developing software that uses augmented reality. Unlike virtual reality, augmented reality combines computer-generated images with what's perceived in the real world. Tucker said he envisions a day when crews working in the field using headsets or other displays will "see" buried utilities as if they possessed X-ray vision.

Tucker said he expects the work in Grand Junction to be completed in 2018 and subsequently put to use. The information could be especially useful in maintaining infrastructure as well as planning for growth, he said. "It's not only where you build, but what you build."

The technology also can be used to combine mapping and information in computer models, he said — taking into account information about flood plains, mountain snowpack levels and weather forecasts to predict the possibility of flooding, for example.

Tucker said the work already has attracted the attention of an organization promoting the use of geospatial intelligence software elsewhere that wants to add Grand Junction to a list of cities that also includes London, New York and Singapore.

Tucker said he hopes the project interests other municipalities to consider similar efforts, in turn creating additional markets for ProStar Geocorp.

Michelle Hadwiger, a deputy director of the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, said the potential for the work of ProStar and other companies that received grants is impressive.

Other companies are working on ways to prevent blindness in people with glaucoma, better deliver medications to the body and inspire youth to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and math.

"One of Colorado's greatest strengths is the constant innovation in our key industries, and we're thrilled to continue to support that ecosystem with funding."