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'Smart city' among the ideas taking shape along Horizon Drive

By Gary Harmon

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Melding Grand Junction's geographic information system with the geospatial expertise of a Horizon Drive tech company could yield a "smart city" that operates more efficiently than less advanced towns and communities.

That's the take of Grand Junction City Manager Greg Caton and the head of Colorado 811, the statewide clearinghouse for all things underground. They've teamed up with Pro-Star Geocorp, a Grand Junction company working to provide clients with a three-dimensional look at the numerous networks of buried utilities.



GRETEL DAUGHERTY / The Daily Sentinel

Page Tucker, chief executive officer of ProStar, relaxes for a moment in his Horizon Drive office.

ProStar Geocorp, headed by Page Tucker, "is just cutting edge," Caton said.

ProStar and city officials started with a program to streamline the process of locating utilities, a sometimes cumbersome process of finding electrical conduits, gas lines, cable-television lines and other utilities that might — or might not — be where they were supposed to have been placed.

The city alone has 400 layers of information in its geographic information system.

ProStar Geocorp has put together a team of experts, many with their own businesses who work in conjunction with Pro-Star, to build 3D views of the city, above and below.

For instance, the gaming backgrounds of Robert and Stephen Madsen of SynaptixGames include expertise in the 3D aspect of mapping. The hard data they work with comes from the geospatial work of people like Carey Wheeler, a geospatial information specialist who used some of these skills in Iraq and Afghanistan. Another veteran, David McGee, who was involved in the NexGen GPS system for the military, also is involved.

Tucker sought out Wheeler, McGee, the Madsens and others to create a synergy that he said he hopes will pay off for ProStar.

ProStar's entrepreneurial bent meshed well with the city's need to better understand its own inner workings, Caton said.

"We set out to see if we could come up with something great," Caton said, "and we did."

Great enough that it caught the attention of Colorado 811, which is looking at ProStar for ways to provide "a much nicer interface than what we're currently using," said J.D. Maniscalco, chief executive officer of Colorado 811.

Giving officials a better look at underground utilities is only the beginning of the products that ProStar Geocorp is planning, Tucker said.

Tracking the condition of roads, sidewalks, and other public improvements via ProStar products can pay off in terms of better maintenance and prevention of catastrophic failures, Tucker said.

It also can help supervisors better direct their staff, or even allow staff to operate with greater autonomy and efficiency using applications being developed by ProStar Geocorp, Tucker said.

In no small part, the operation in the Shaw building is a tech hub already, and Tucker said he hopes to attract more tech companies and entrepreneurs to the Shaw building, pointing to the proximity of restaurants and hotels, as well as Grand Junction Regional Airport.

The most important thing, though, is the establishment of an atmosphere of resource and idea sharing, Tucker said, "That's where things start happening."