

Machine Shop Awarded for Out of This World Parts

By Mark Madler - 11/9/2009
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In the office of his Simi Valley manufacturing company, George Melamed holds the list of this year's winners of the Spotbeam Awards given out by the California Space Authority.

Among them are Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin, the second man to walk on the moon; Google Earth, the popular online mapping program; and Space Exploration Technologies, the Hawthorne-based developer of reusable launch vehicles.

And then there is Melamed's company, UDASH Inc., winner of the Small Disadvantaged Business Award for providing precision machined parts used on the Mars rovers Spirit and Opportunity, and the International Space Station.

"It's not an easy thing to be recognized along with the big guys," said Melamed, an Iranian immigrant. "We are going to be right among the biggies, like Google and Buzz Aldrin. It is not bad for a bunch of rookies. Compared to them we are rookies."

While a company that has been around nearly 30 years and performed contract work for NASA has passed beyond the rookie status Melamed assigns to UDASH, he does believe that the company is still in a learning phase.

It certainly is still in a growing phase, having moved in July to a new 25,000-square-foot building in an industrial park off Tapo Street. Melamed invested the money he had set aside for his retirement to buy the building. The move to a larger space than he had in Calabasas necessitated hiring two more employees, bringing the total to 15 workers.

"At a time when everyone else is cutting jobs and hours I do the exact opposite," Melamed said. "Why" I'm an optimist and hard working."

A precision machining job shop that can do prototype parts and spit out a high volume of components, UDASH falls into the clean manufacturing category that Simi Valley likes to attract to its borders.

There are a fair number of similar small businesses doing contract work for aerospace manufacturers or subcontractors that fly below the radar, said Brian Gabler, an assistant city manager and director of economic development.

"These (businesses) are valuable to us because they work hard every day and provide vital job opportunities," Gabler said.

UDASH counts Lockheed Martin and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory as main customers, with some work also supplied to Boeing. To diversify its base, Melamed would also like to supply the automotive after-market industry.

In 2002 and again in 2005, UDASH was recognized by NASA with national Awards of Excellence in Fabrication for the components provided for the Mars Rovers.

The award from the California Space Authority recognizes UDASH for its contributions to the space and aerospace sectors through its manufacturing services.

Melamed hopes that the exposure winning the award brings will result in more contract work with other government sectors.

Previous Spotbeam recipients include the Antelope Valley Board of Trade and the Mojave Air and Space Port with the Business Development and Retention Award and XCor Aerospace in Mojave.

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