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VIDA Products wins grant for NASA project

Tiny company hopes to develop components for global warming satellites.

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By Business Journal Staff Reporter Lorelee Stevens



SANTA ROSA – VIDA Products, a four-person Santa Rosa company, has won a Small Business Innovation Research grant to develop a key component of a satellite constellation NASA will use to assess global warming.

VIDA, described by President and CEO Ron Parrott as a "struggling startup since 2003" – the year it was founded, supplies radio frequency components and subsystems for a range of high-tech industries, including aerospace, homeland security and broadband wireless.

The award and the products it will enable VIDA to develop could lead to significant growth for the company, which has four full-time employees and a roster of consultants.

"We've been working with the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory for about a year, so we knew about the satellite project when we applied for the grant," said Mr. Parrott. "We'll partner with JPL for the project."

The small business grants are phased, with an initial \$100,000 going toward a proposal for Phase II, which brings an additional \$690,000 or more for the development and testing of hardware. Phase III, for an unspecified amount, takes the hardware to production.

VIDA will be developing a rugged oscillator with very low power consumption to convert analog signals to digital and digital signals to analog. It will enable measurements that have never been made before.

"The last 10 years have seen a revolution in measurement tools, as digital signals allow very precise readings," said Mr. Parrott. "But converting those analog signals to digital is the key. The capability our oscillator will offer has never existed before, and it'll make profound changes in systems design."

NASA expects to launch its low-atmosphere-testing constellation in five years to make more precise analyses of global warming. The VIDA product will have applications in deep space exploration as well.

Non-NASA applications are also exciting. The improved phase-noise performance has the potential to revolutionize WiMax by allowing any number of users to operate in a zone without impacting data speed. Also, robotics need sensors that are not jammed by neighboring signals from other nearby sources.

Bimolecular sensors, airline guidance and navigation, spaceport infrastructure and factory automation are a few of the areas Mr. Parrott listed as candidates for the VIDA product on the NASA Web site.

"We expect to grow some, probably to not more than 10 employees for the first year. And we won't be neglecting our current 100+ customers."

In addition to supplying new products, VIDA does repair work, a good hedge against recession.

"I'm kicking myself for not applying for an SBIR grant before. This is the first time we submitted a proposal, and they accepted it immediately," said Mr. Parrott.

The company Web site is www.vidaproducts.com.