

Geodynamics readies new facility at business park

BY MARK HIBBS
NEWS-TIMES

MOREHEAD CITY — The county's largely undeveloped industrial park here will soon have a new occupant.

But that business, Geodynamics, isn't a newcomer to the area.

The corporation, which specializes in seafloor mapping, topographical surveys and global information systems database design and development, started out 10 years ago in the home of owners Sloan and Chris Freeman of Pine Knoll Shores.

The firm — a primary contractor with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Wilmington District that performs high-resolution seafloor mapping — broke ground at the business park in the fall of 2010 and Mr. Freeman said he hopes to be moved in by summer.

That day won't come soon enough, Mr. Freeman said, as the operation has already outgrown the 2,500-square-foot space it leases on Industrial Drive.

"This is something we've wanted to do for years," Mr. Freeman said. "We worked with the county hand in hand to get into the business park and I think we're a good fit for the park. It's been a great experience working with the county and sharing our vision."

The Freemans have four other employees and the tight working conditions were becoming an obstacle to further growth.

"I just literally can't fit anyone else in here with the equipment, and we also have a third boat that we can't keep on site," Mr. Freeman said. "We needed a place to really expand into."

That new place will feature amenities that most businesses wouldn't consider but ones Mr. Freeman said are essential to Geodynamics' operation.

The 10,000-square-foot, two-story structure includes 2,500 square feet of office space plus more than 1,500 square feet of shop space and boat storage that Geodynamics plans to use.

"All our boats have a lot of high-dollar research equipment on them," Mr. Freeman said, adding that leaving that gear outside and unprotected isn't an option.

The remainder of the space will eventually be leased out.

"Our dream is to bring in another marine science business or biotech firm. We hope to see the area become like a marine science or biotech business park," Mr. Freeman said.

The construction also includes what Mr. Freeman called "commonsense green elements" such as added insulation for energy

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Geodynamics

efficiency and geothermal heating and water heating systems.

"We want to do the right thing and for me it's really fun to conserve energy," Mr. Freeman said, adding that he and his wife and business partner both have degrees in environmental science.

The new facility also features a shower and locker room, because, like fireman and other emergency responders, Geodynamics' team of technicians are often called out at a moment's notice.

"The building was constructed as an essential facilities building, like a fire station," Mr. Freeman said, adding that the metal structure, built by Coastal Buildings of Morehead City has extra welds and other added strengths to stand up to coastal storms and

"We need to be around right after storms. A lot of our work is post-storm analysis. We study what hurricanes do to sea floor and the dunes," he said.

The new structure will also include a computer server "safe room" that is totally encapsulated in concrete block and located in the center of the building to safeguard the operation's most critical computer equipment.

"Our business is basically data. God forbid anything happen to our computers," Mr. Freeman said.

The basic scope of the firm's work hasn't changed since 2001. Its basic applications include big dredge projects, working with the contracted dredge companies before and after surveys to calculate the amount of material taken.

"Our data is so accurate, they trust us to figure out how they get paid," Mr. Freeman said of the contractors.

The firm also has a contract with the County Shore Protection Office to perform beach mapping and monitoring of shoreline erosion.

Also, Geodynamics also works for the Navy in Jacksonville, Fla., where there are plans in the works for an undersea warfare training range that had once been considered for the North Carolina coast.

That work includes surveys of

the seafloor and shipwrecks and ocean habitat mapping as well as sediment sampling and geophysical work, such as identifying rock layers.

But despite this important work, Geodynamics isn't well known, especially here at home.

"One of our big problems is a lot of people don't really know we exist," Mr. Freeman said.

But as a small, woman-owned business, the firm is beginning to garner name recognition where it counts. The minority business status is opening important doors for government contracting with the state.

"We fit into a lot of the government's small bus niches," he said.

About 85 percent of the company's work is federal government contracting.



Geodynamics is building in the county-owned industrial park in Morehead City this 10,000-square-foot, two-story structure with 2,500 square feet of office space plus more than 1,500 square feet of shop space and boat storage. (Mark Hibbs photo)

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