

Navsys Corp. expands to Salida

J.D. Thomas, Mail Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, February 7, 2014 7:30 am

Monument-based Navsys Corp. will expand its offices to the Twitchell Building, 101 N. F St., in Salida after construction is completed, Dr. Alison Brown, founder, president and CEO, said.

Navsys specializes in global positioning systems, internal navigation systems and communications systems. The company has contracts with the U.S. Department of Defense, NASA, Homeland Security and various large businesses in the aerospace arena, said Brown.

“One of the projects we are working on now for the government is a worldwide GPS interference monitoring system,” Brown said. “Some countries allow frequencies that aren’t too far off from the GPS band.”

One of two Navsys employees in Salida, Aaron Blondeau, is working on a project that adds a layer of protection to military communications in the Nett Warrior system. The Army bought commercial products and adapted it to military use, Brown said.

“The added layer of protection would detect GPS spoofing and switch the devices to more secure military specifications,” Brown said.

Nett Warrior is an “integrated dismounted situational awareness and mission command system for use during combat operations,” according to the U.S. Army.

The company currently employs 20 people, Brown said. Most of the employees work in Monument, while two currently work remotely from Salida.

Brown said she had visited Salida in the past because of its proximity to the river and ski slopes. “I would come down here with friends, and we’d go skiing or kayaking,” she said.

She is selling her home in Monument and plans to live in Salida full time. “It ended up that we were spending more than half our time here,” Brown said.

Brown holds a doctorate in mechanics, aerospace and nuclear engineering from UCLA, a master’s degree in aeronautics and astronautics from MIT, and master’s and bachelor’s degrees in engineering from Cambridge University.

She currently serves on the Region VIII Small Business Regulatory Fairness Board of the U.S. Small Business Administration. Brown also served two terms on the U.S. Air Force Science Advisory Board.

She said she hopes the construction of the upstairs portion of the Twitchell Building will be finished by summer. The basement should be done in a month or two.

Brown worked with Salida Business Incubator and the Sangre de Cristo Electric Association to secure a \$550,000, zero-percent, 10-year loan. The loan is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant program.

Brown is founder of the business incubator in Salida and the Tri-Lakes Business Incubator in northern Colorado Springs.

“It took about a year to navigate the process,” Brown said. “It took a lot of work for something that can really benefit the community.”

One in two startups fails in the first 2 years, said Brown. “We need a culture that doesn’t punish failure,” she said. “We need to value people who take risks.”

The approximately 1,000-square-foot basement of the building will be used as a business incubator, a place for local tech startup companies to brainstorm and network. “There will also be small, private offices,” Brown said. “An investment capital group is also looking to move in upstairs as well.”

She said she hopes the high tech entrepreneurs can add to the Salida Creative District.

The lack of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) classes for Salida High School students is something else Brown is concerned about. “It’s important to have a skilled workforce here,” she said. “The more educated the population, the stronger the community.”

It’s important to get children, especially girls, interested in STEM classes by the age of 12, said Brown. “STEM classes are harder than any other classes they are going to take.”

She worked with the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs, to teach Salida Middle School, Crest Academy, Salida High School and Horizons Exploratory Academy students how to program using Legos. The students learned basic programming skills in one day, said Brown.

As part of the Salida Business Incubator, Brown collaborated with Salida Creative District, the Salida Regional Library and the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering at UCCS to sponsor a 3-D printing design contest.

The contest is open to middle-schoolers, high-schoolers and members of the community. “We had to update the submission date to Feb. 16,” Brown said. “We’ll present the winning designs March 8 at Salida SteamPlant.”

To find out more about Navsys, visit navsys.com. For more information about Salida Business Incubator and the 3-D printing contest, visit Salidabi.org.