



Photo provided

Paul Arlton (left), president of Lite Machines Corp., and his brother, Dave, vice president, are shown at the booth their company operated at the recent Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International trade show in San Diego.

Company's shift in focus leads to multiyear deal with Navy

By **MAX SHOWALTER**

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A business decision made several years ago, to move away from the hobby market and focus on customers in the military, law enforcement and homeland security fields is paying dividends for Lite Machines Corp.

The company that was founded at Purdue Research Park in West Lafayette in 1991 has been awarded a \$10.5 million contract from the U.S. Navy.

Under the five-year development and acquisition agreement, the firm will produce its Voyeur helicopter, a remote-controlled device that measures 27 inches in length and has capabilities that run from close-range surveillance to detonation of impro-

vised explosive devices.

"Our helicopter is a computer with no monitor that handles 200 million operations per second. This thing can stop and go up and down," said Paul Arlton, president of Lite Machines, the high-tech firm he founded with his brother, Dave, who is vice president. "We've developed it all ourselves, which was a huge amount of work.

"The contract can be extended to \$125 million. Our goals are to start refining the vehicle with this contract and start delivery of vehicles for use in (the military) theater and then to basically develop the market."

Equipped with cameras, sensors and other devices, the Voyeur has folding rotor blades, the ability to hover and stare and can be used as a "flying grenade" to take out snipers.

"You can position it anywhere and watch things. It can be hand-launched, shot out of a tube or dropped from a helicopter or airplane," Paul Arlton said. "There has been a huge, huge push in the military to shift its focus from large, manned systems to small, unmanned systems. Warfare is becoming more roboticized."

Lite Machines demonstrated its unmanned aerial vehicles earlier this month at the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International trade show in San Diego.

"Now there's a mandate that UAVs carry some type of armament. Now that it's funded by the federal government it's a huge, huge push. Our program has been evolving and gotten bigger," Paul Arlton said. "It's a

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combination of us being in the right place at the right time and the military wanting more bang for their buck.”

Blast from the past

The device uses some of the software code from GATO, a submarine simulation computer game the Arltons helped create more than 20 years ago.

In the future, the 3-to-4-pound helicopter UAV could be used for tasks that include security, border control and environmental compliance.

One issue the high-tech firm encountered in landing the Navy contract over 40 competitors is the stop-and-go nature of dealing with the military.

“A lot of companies are getting out of this market because

the length of time between the contract (award) and payment is so tough,” said Dave Arlton.

“By contrast, we are in it for profit. They’re paying for development. It takes a lot to stick with it.

“As a business you want to do certain things, but there is a disconnect. If you want to work and survive in this market you have to be able to deal with that. It’s a different environment.”

Lite Machines has eight employees, but the new multimillion contract will allow the company to increase its staffing levels with engineers, computer programmers and other high-tech workers.

“Eventually we could add 100 people. These would be higher wage, labor-skilled positions,” said Paul Arlton.

“Our vehicle and the way we do things is very unique. It’s very economical for the military. They want to make thousands of them.”
