

SKYHIGH

By **Greg Lund**



The sky's the limit at Northrop Grumman's newest facility, where unencumbered airspace is plentiful. And that's the beauty of the Grand Sky Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) Business and Aviation Park near Grand Forks, North Dakota.

Northrop Grumman Aerospace Systems and Mission Systems are joining forces to staff and operate the 36,000-square-foot facility at Grand Sky.

Janis Pamiljans, corporate vice president and sector president, Aerospace Systems, officially opened the new building in April. It serves as a nucleus for research and development, aircraft maintenance, and operations and mission analysis, as well as pilot, operator and maintainer training.

"We are delighted to officially begin operations here at Grand Sky, cementing our leadership in the development and use of autonomous systems in partnership with North Dakota's UAS (unmanned aircraft systems) community," Pamiljans said. "The important work performed at Grand Sky will support the evolving needs of our customers while advancing research and development of our autonomous systems capabilities for today and the future."

That's music to the ears of North Dakota's burgeoning UAS community. Recognizing the special commitment the Red River Valley region was making to develop a world-class UAS technology corridor, Northrop Grumman signed a Strategic Alliance Agreement with North Dakota officials in 2013 to expand its business operations in the state.

Furthermore, North Dakota's elected, business and community leaders have shown great vision in pulling together their state's innovative university system, its rich tradition with the U.S. Air Force and its location as home of the Federal Aviation Administration's UAS Test Site. Their goal is to create a specialized environment where UAS technology research can thrive. U.S. Sen. John Hoeven (R-N.D.) has been a big proponent of his state's UAS growth and has supported Northrop Grumman in its North Dakota ventures.

Hoeven, who's played an active role in negotiations between the Air Force and Grand Sky, said that recent global events highlight the need for the development of the Global Hawk and other UAS technology, in both the military and civilian worlds.

"The case we make is that we should continue to invest in the technology of the future," Hoeven said. "And so far, that's worked well for us. We'll continue to make that argument."

"We have to maintain our leadership with the rest of the world when it comes to military applications," Hoeven continued.

"Northrop Grumman is a leader in autonomous aircraft systems, so it was only natural to cooperate with the UAS community in North Dakota, especially in Grand Forks," said Pamiljans. "We are also collaborating with the University of North Dakota

and the Northland Community and Technical College in Minnesota to further UAS education."

Some graduates from those local programs are being wooed to fill positions in our Grand Sky operation.

While hiring continues, construction work has begun on a hangar that will be adjacent to the office and laboratory building. The 35,000-square-foot hangar will house two Global Hawk aircraft and facilitate autonomous system aircraft maintenance and flight testing. It will also take advantage of the park's access to the adjacent Grand Forks Air Force Base, home to a squadron of RQ-4 Global Hawk high-altitude, long-endurance autonomous aircraft.

Soon, North Dakota's sky will be a little busier and feature autonomous aircraft of varying sizes and shapes. And Northrop Grumman will be right in the middle of it. (r)



Northrop Grumman's new facility in Grand Sky, N.D.

Photo by **Terry Phrang**