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Bezos' Blue Origin to Set Up Rocket HQ in Washington State

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The Seattle-based Blue Origin rocket company, bankrolled by Jeff Bezos, founder of *Amazon.com*, plans to set up corporate headquarters and primary operations in the city of Kent, Washington next year.

Secretive in their rocket work, Blue Origin is developing a passenger-carrying vertical takeoff and landing rocket.

According to a recent statement from the City of Kent's mayor, Jim White, Blue Origin will house the rocket firm's research, design, and manufacturing, assembly, and test operations in the city of 84,000 people, creating a capacity for up to 100 jobs.

Blue Origin executives anticipate that the company's launch facility in West Texas, combined with its new Kent headquarters, will support the rocket group's long-term mission, "to enable an enduring human presence in space."

"We were won over by Kent's attractive business climate," said Rob Meyerson, Blue Origin Program Manager, in a press statement issued by the City of Kent. "It is centrally located with easy access to major transportation corridors," Meyerson stated.

Kent's proximity to SeaTac airport and its location as a mass transit hub was a factor in Blue Origin's decision to establish its



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new headquarters in the city, White said.

Texas takeoffs

Earlier this year, details regarding Blue Origin's rocket work were highlighted in public meetings held in Texas. The rocket company is building launch facilities in Culberson County, Texas, put in place to test a series of launch vehicles, the first of which will take off and land vertically, carrying three or more astronauts to the edge of space, according to statements made at the time by Meyerson.

The launch site on privately-owned property is to comprise about 800 acres of the 167,000-acre Corn Ranch.

During the West Texas town meetings, Meyerson said Blue Origin anticipates a flight test of its vehicle in the fourth quarter of 2006--a time frame that depends on readiness of the vehicle and launch site, he added.

Incremental construction of the launch site and facilities were to begin in early 2006, taking about a year to complete.

Flight testing is to span three to five years before regular commercial flights would start, Meyerson said. During the testing phase, he said that he anticipated launching less than 25 times a year.

Test program

According to a briefly-posted document on the Blue Origin web site, the group's reusable launch vehicle (RLV) would haul paying passengers on suborbital jaunts. The group's rocket would be comprised of a propulsion module and a crew capsule. Hydrogen peroxide and kerosene are to be used as propellants.

The Bezos booster would be fully reusable, flying autonomously under control of on-board computers. There would be no ground control during nominal flight conditions, the document explained.

Taking off vertically from a concrete pad, the craft would land vertically in an area near the launch site. That flight profile is similar to the trajectory flown by the Pentagon/NASA-sponsored Delta Clipper Experimental (DC-X).

The DC-X was built under contract at McDonnell Douglas and repeatedly flew from the White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico starting in the early 1990s.

Blue Origin said it intended to perform unmanned RLV developmental test flights from the proposed facility beginning in the third quarter of 2006. Once the technology had been thoroughly tested, passenger flight service using the RLV would occur at a maximum rate of 52 launches per year. The RLV was identified as being capable of carrying three or more passengers per operation.

According to a *SPACE.com* source, Blue Origin has tested an unpiloted vertical takeoff and vertical landing platform, purportedly powered by four turbojets. Shakeout testing of the platform's control system took place in Central Eastern Washington State.

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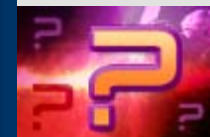
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