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GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO

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## Get smart

### Grand Junction on map as part of Smart City Alliance

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Inside ProStar Geocorp's Horizon Drive headquarters, geospatial information specialists work with devices such as a Hololens, an augmented reality device that allows the user to explore the surroundings and interior of a space without leaving one's seat. It essentially gives the person X-ray vision.

Looking through one of these devices, one can see what's inside the wall or map items from outside and virtually bring them in the room with you. For ProStar it's a useful device for mapping what lies underneath the ground, including pipes, gas lines and electrical conduits, which is the company's specialty.



CHANCEY BUSH / The Daily Sentinel

Carey Wheeler, geospatial intelligence specialist, demonstrates reality with the Microsoft Hololens. ProStar Geocorp is developing a software capable of location underground utilities and is partnering with the city of Grand Junction to join Smart City Alliance.

For some time, ProStar has been in business with oil pipeline companies, working on geospatial interface technology to locate underground pipes, but recently, ProStar aligned with the city of Grand Junction, the Colorado Department of Transportation and Colorado 811 to make the process of locating utilities more efficient.

That partnership garnered a \$250,000 grant from the state Office of Economic Development and attracted the interest of the Colorado Smart Cities Alliance, which Grand Junction officially joined last week.

While smart cities exist around the country and the globe, Colorado's Smart Cities Alliance is the only one of its kind in the U.S. and kicked off in September. Grand Junction is the 13th city to join and the first outside the Front Range. The alliance encourages collaboration between these cities and catalogs best practices on specific projects that each city is contributing.

“We get to put Grand Junction on the map in Colorado as the only city on the Western Slope that is part of the Smart Cities Alliance, which to me, then truly makes it a connected community,” said Page Tucker, president and CEO of ProStar Geocorp.

Many of the cities involved in the alliance, which includes the likes of Denver, Fort Collins, Boulder and Lone Tree, are involved in public/private partnerships that could result in more collaborations for these private entities should other cities in the alliance want to start a similar project in their area.



Carey Wheeler, geospatial intelligence specialist, displays a map of underground utilities using a developing software at ProStar Geocorp.

To join the Smart Cities Alliance, Grand Junction sent a letter from City Manager Greg Caton, requesting the city’s inclusion. There’s no cost to join the group and cities are only asked to continue looking at innovative projects and sharing data.

“This is a good example of some great cities doing things and they have recognized Grand Junction in the same right. We’ve earned that through the great work we’ve been doing for many years,” Caton said. “To be recognized as a leader among our peers in an ever-evolving industry is very important.”

The Smart Cities Alliance is also partnered with the University of Colorado Denver, which will be analyzing and collecting data and working with cities that need help with research, according to Nolbert Chavez, who is managing the partnership for CU Denver.

According to Smart Cities Alliance co-founder Jake Rishavy, the program should not only be beneficial for Grand Junction, but to other cities who might look to the partnership between Grand Junction and ProStar and want to implement a similar system.

“The city gets essentially free access to some of the leading thinkers in the private sector and by networking into other cities, all cities get exposed to new ideas to solve problems,” said Rishavy, who is also vice president of the Denver South Economic Development Partnership, the organization that launched the alliance.

The long-term goal of ProStar Geocorp’s project with Grand Junction, Colorado 811 and CDOT is to provide a more precise system for locating all underground utilities in an area. As part of a \$250,000 grant from the Office of Economic Development, ProStar must find an additional \$500,000 in the next six months.

“This type of collaboration is exactly what is required to produce more accurate and more efficient service directly tied into city operations and, probably more importantly, public safety,” Rishavy said. Colorado 811 tracks utilities that are buried underground and has a call service, similar to the 411 information

line, where anyone can call for information on what is buried and where. Colorado 811 also works with stakeholder organizations to collect data.

CEO J.D. Maniscalco said the technology that ProStar offers — which digitally records utility location down to the centimeter — is better than what is currently in use and he sees a lot of potential in the partnership. “We really like what they have to offer in the GIS space and how they can help us to manage those assets, communicate in emergency and damage situations, and manage infrastructure at a higher level than we do at this time,” he said. “We see that as a tremendous improvement.”

In other communities such as Denver, the city has made several partnerships with private entities and stakeholders, including Panasonic, which relocated to Denver recently. Denver has also been operating under its own smart city initiative since 2015.

The city and Panasonic partnered on a streetlight project that allowed the city to have greater control over portals so the lights are not either on or off, but can be adjusted to account for weather and other factors. Denver was asked to be a charter member of the Smart City Alliance, and program manager Emily Silverman sees it as a good step.

“We already have so much data, the idea is how we work together,” she said. “Smart Cities is a great tool and methodology to that.”

For Grand Junction, Caton feels that the designation could be an attractive attribute for technology companies looking to relocate. Tucker also feels a smaller city like Grand Junction could quickly become a leading innovator due to less red tape to wade through than in bigger cities.

“I think the real innovation will take place in cities like Grand Junction,” he said.