

Fort Worth's AVX Aircraft grows with helicopter contract

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BY BOB COX

rcox@star-telegram.com

AVX Aircraft Co., the newest helicopter company to take off in Fort Worth, is gaining a bit of altitude.

With a government contract in hand, AVX is working with several partner companies and has moved beyond the "struggling startup" phase, President Troy Gaffey said.

U.S. Rep. Kay Granger, R-Fort Worth, joined Gaffey and AVX founder David Brody for a ribbon-cutting Thursday to mark the company's move into larger quarters in southwest Fort Worth. Extra space was needed, Gaffey said, after the Army awarded AVX a \$4 million-plus contract last fall for detailed engineering studies. Suddenly the company had to hire engineers, and the staff went from 12 to 30, including four Texas Christian University interns.

AVX was one of four companies to land contracts to do studies that will lead to proposals for the Army's next-generation helicopter. The competitors are all military helicopter heavyweights: Sikorsky Aircraft, Boeing and the Bell Helicopter-Boeing tilt-rotor team.

"Technically, we can compete with them," said Gaffey, who spent 38 years as an engineer at Bell. "The issue, I think, boils down to financial strength. One of the solutions is to have partners that bring financial strength and technical strength."

Several aerospace companies, including Triumph Aerostructure's Vought Aircraft Division in Dallas, are working with AVX.

AVX is also working with BAE Systems on a potential Navy unmanned helicopter program and has proposed a major overhaul of the Army's OH-58D Kiowa Warrior scout helicopters.

All of the AVX projects would use an old concept made practical with modern technology to dramatically improve the speed, range and lifting capability of helicopters. By using a compound coaxial rotor system (two counter-rotating rotors) and ducted fans (essentially propellers), AVX contends that it's feasible to design a helicopter with vastly improved performance over existing technology.

Sikorsky is following similar technology with its X2 coaxial rotor helicopter demonstration project.

Granger praised AVX for its innovation, saying that "it means our war fighters will have the very best," and that if it succeeds it will keep jobs in the U.S. and Fort Worth.