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Flying saucers headed to Spaceport America, company says

By Diana M. Alba DALBA@LCSUN-NEWS.COM

Posted: 10/21/2011 12:41:46 AM MDT

LAS CRUCES - Flying saucers were once the stuff of fantasy.

But now they're on the verge of becoming reality.

And they may be on their way to Spaceport America, said one visiting company Thursday, the final day of this week's international spaceflight symposium in Las Cruces.

Ten-foot-diameter, two-passenger flying saucers are being developed by the California-based Moller International. They lift straight off the ground, like a helicopter, and can reach heights of 5,000 feet and speeds of up to 100 mph, said Lindsay O'Brien Quarrie, chairman of Space Sciences Corp., distributor for the aircraft.

"We're hoping to fly this at the spaceport in 2012," said Quarrie, whose company is based just north of Socorro.

The company has submitted a proposal to become part of Spaceport America's visitor experience. The saucers would give tourists who aren't traveling to suborbital space something to do at the site, Quarrie said.

"We have the opportunity to introduce it to a spaceport and spaceports across the world to 'edu-tain' people, entertainment with education," he said.

The vehicles' speed and height would be capped to 35 mph and 10 feet or less.

But the saucers, unlike helicopters, have encased rotors, and are able to maneuver more closely to other objects, said John D'Alessandro, technical services manager for Space Sciences Corp. And because of that, the flying saucers would have broader, practical applications, such as for herding cattle on a ranch.

Space



Wayne Hale, director of Human Spaceflight for Special Aerospace... (Robin Zielinski/Sun-News)

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Sciences Corp. was among the exhibitors preparing to pack away its display Thursday afternoon, along with other companies in the final day of the International Symposium for Personal and Commercial Spaceflight. It was attended by many of the top companies in the emerging commercial spaceflight industry. Some participants plan to go on a tour today of Spaceport America, the \$209 million, state-owned launch facility being built just north of Do-a Ana County.

Symposium attendee and former U.S. astronaut Ken Bowersox, now vice president for astronaut safety for Space X, said he's not able to visit the spaceport today, but he believes the project is a boon to the state and to the commercial aerospace industry as a whole. The California-based SpaceX is developing an orbital vehicle, while Spaceport America's anchor tenant, Virgin Galactic, is developing a suborbital vehicle. Their markets, for now, don't overlap, he said.

"What happens with Virgin Galactic is going to help the entire industry because the more people we can expose to the space environment - even if it's for a few minutes at a time - the fewer people we'll have to convince of why it's important to explore space," he said. "That will help advance the overall cause."

But Bowersox said there's another advantage to sending tourists spaceward.

"It will let people see our planet from a different vantage point, and, whenever they do that, they come back feeling like they want to protect it a little bit more," he said.

Meanwhile, attendee Paul Higbie, an adjunct professor in physics at New Mexico State University, said the spaceport is part of the reason his department is creating a new master's degree emphasis in space physics. He was hoping to drum up support for the move among conference attendees.

"There are a number of growing activities in the state," he said. "There's the spaceport, that this county has paid money

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for. With space, there is a need to provide service to the students throughout this state."

The event started Tuesday at the New Mexico Farm & Ranch Heritage Museum, 4100 Dripping Springs Road. Officials said between 400 and 500 people attended.

Diana M. Alba can be reached at (575) 541-5443.

On the Web

- Moller International: www.moller.com
- International Symposium for Personal and Commercial Spaceflight: www.ispcs.com
- Space Sciences Corp.www.spacesciencescorp.com

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