

Boeing to double staff for space plane effort

The company is at the design stage in a battle with Lockheed for prime contract.

By GARY ROBBINS
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HUNTINGTON BEACH
Boeing-Huntington Beach will almost double the number of people working on designs for its proposed Orbital Space Plane, a possible crew-transfer and rescue vehicle for the International Space Station.

"A year from now, we should be near 300 people (up from 180) in Huntington Beach," said Volker Roth, dep-

uty manager of Boeing's Orbital Space Program, which is headquartered in Huntsville, Ala.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration contract for preliminary designs of the OSP could be worth upward of \$100 million, Roth said. NASA has already awarded Boeing \$43 million on the OSP, much of it for concept work performed in Huntington Beach.

Boeing is competing with Lockheed Martin for the prime contract to design and build the OSP, a vehicle that would largely replace the space shuttle. Boeing's working concept resembles the tip of the command module of the Apollo spacecraft, which

transported astronauts to and from the moon more than a generation ago.

The OSP would be launched on a heavy-lift rocket - possibly Boeing's Delta IV - and dock with the space station for crew transfer and, if necessary, rescue missions. Boeing's working plans call for the plane to use heat shields to slow its re-entry into the atmosphere, then deploy parachutes so the vehicle could touch down on land or possibly in the sea.

Roth said, "We believe (our) concept would lend itself to an expansion of duties." Such changes could be necessary. President George W. Bush is expected to further detail his space agenda Wednesday. Ad-

ministration officials say the agenda will include sending humans back to the moon, where a long-term habitat would be established.

Boeing-Huntington Beach - which was a division of Douglas Aircraft when it opened in 1963 - designed the upper stage of the Saturn V rocket used in Project Apollo. The company also designed and built the heart of Skylab, the nation's first space station.

About 6,500 people work at Boeing-Huntington Beach, a major engineering center that's largely involved in defense projects.

CONTACT THE WRITER:

(714) 796-7970

or grobbins@ocregister.com

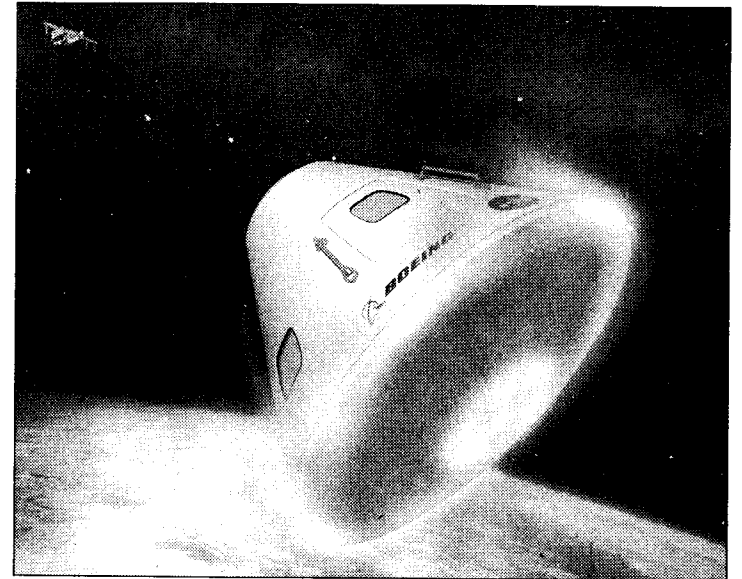


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FUTURISTIC: Artist's rendition of Orbital Space Plane on re-entry into Earth's atmosphere.