

# Rocketing to success

## Pittsburgh's space industry is thriving

INTERVIEWED BY SUE OSTROWSKI

As Pittsburgh and the surrounding region continue to attract and grow companies that support the space industry, a space collaborative is gaining ground to bring stakeholders together.

"If we do things right, Pittsburgh is well-positioned to be recognized as a center for research and commercialization of space-related technologies and innovation," says Justine Kasznica, an attorney at Babst Calland.

*Smart Business* spoke with Kasznica about the growing number of local companies and regional stakeholders supporting space exploration.

### HOW DID THE SPACE COLLABORATIVE BEGIN?

In 2019, Astrobotic Technology Inc., a Pittsburgh-based space robotics company building lunar delivery capabilities, made national news when it was awarded an \$80 million NASA grant for a mission to develop a lunar lander to deliver payload to the lunar surface. This year, Astrobotic was awarded an additional \$200 million NASA grant for an historic mission to deliver a NASA rover to drill for water ice on the South Pole of the Moon. A group of individuals representing industry, academia, local and state government, as well as regional economic development organizations — all passionate about space — saw this as a unique opportunity to coalesce a broader network of existing regional assets to establish a space industry group in Pittsburgh.

### WHAT ROLE HAVE OTHER INSTITUTIONS PLAYED IN BRINGING PITTSBURGH TO THE FOREFRONT OF SPACE-RELATED INDUSTRIES?

Pittsburgh has been involved in space history since the Apollo era, having manufactured

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much of the steel and glass hardware, as well as communications technology, for the Apollo 11 mission. Today, the region's advanced manufacturing capabilities and world-class expertise in artificial intelligence, robotics, and space transport and logistics can propel Pittsburgh to an even more dominant seat at the table.

Local universities, in partnership with industry and the federal government, are actively engaged in planetary science research, space navigation, mobility and robotics programs. Life science companies are researching how tissue reacts, grows and interacts with other factors in a zero-gravity environment.

Other stakeholders are working on advanced technologies that are optimized for an extreme space environment and are developing experiments to send to the International Space Station and beyond. Still others are building business, legal and policy capabilities designed to support a growing global space industry.

### WHAT IS THE COLLABORATIVE'S GOAL?

The goal is to become a space economic development organization committed to supporting the emerging global commercial space industry by attracting and growing the next generation of space industry businesses and workforce talent in Pittsburgh and the region.

### WHAT IS THE SPACE COLLABORATIVE CURRENTLY DOING?

The group is engaging in four distinct ways.

- Sponsorship and partnership opportunities. The collaborative is looking for and identifying sponsors and partners to support regional programs and events and to identify research and funding opportunities for the region that align with the collaborative's mission.
- Ecosystem mapping. The collaborative is building a regional map of key participants in the space industry and identifying relevant cross-disciplinary skills in the region that can be leveraged by the space industry, as well as skills gaps that need to be further developed to enable a robust space ecosystem.
- Government relations/policy. The collaborative is committed to securing strong partnerships with local, state and federal governments, with the goal of driving the development of policies and laws to support the rapid development of a commercial space industry, on and off-Earth, within the existing Outer Space Treaty framework.
- Education. The collaborative will develop educational materials, networking opportunities, industry events and speaker series to introduce the public to the regional space ecosystem and drive broad cross-sector collaboration. ●