Huntsville Times August 8, 2008

AEgis' 'wings' soar over Beijing

3D digital model part of NBC's coverage

By BRIAN LAWSON
Times Business Writer
brian.lawson@htimes.com

Olympic viewers, courtesy of Huntsville's AEgis Technologies, will be "flying" virtually across Beijing and from venue to venue during NBC's coverage starting tonight.

The company built an interactive 3D digital model of Beijing, with building scale, changing weather and access to even the restricted Forbidden City, using satellite images and a team of programmers and computer modelers.

NBC used snippets of model images during the "Today" show this week, including part of a segment on Tiananmen Square and the Imperial Palace.

It looks you're flying around Beijing and into the Olympic sites, but it's a model.

Under its agreement with NBC, the

Please see **AEGIS** *on* **A4**

Bryan Bacon/Huntsville Times

David King, left, and AEgis CEO Steve Hill display a 3D rendering of the Olympic village and stadium with new technology developed by the company.

AEgis

Continued from page **A1**

logos of AEgis and satellite image provider DigitalGlobe – which supplies Google Earth, among others – will appear each time the 3D images are used.

The Beijing project – which follows the simulation firm's work modeling the Green Zone in Baghdad and the Super Bowl in Arizona – was done on behalf of the U.S. government for Olympic security.

NBC, which faced no-fly zones and other restrictions on where and how it could film, became aware of the technology and wanted its own copy to offer views it couldn't otherwise provide.

"It just blew people away when we gave it to them," said David E. King, vice president of AEgis simulation development group, crediting his team of five programmers and 15 modelers who worked on the Beijing project for three months. "We put a lot of really neat capabilities in there."

King said his team had gotten so immersed in building Beijing, they dreamed about it at night.

The technology, which uses off-the-shelf software, satellite images from DigitalGlobe and publicly available pictures, has multiple applications, including real-estate sales, architecture, disaster planning and event security. The models provide lines of sight for security and route planning, distances from a rooftop to the road, tools to add obstructions, weather and even Beijing's notorious smog.

Because they use open source images, the technology is not considered classified, said AEgis CEO Steve Hill. This makes the entire production and delivery process to government customers run much smoother. King said he's not sure how much the security sensitive Chinese government knows about what is actually available about its capital on the Web.

"It just blew people away when we gave it to them."

David E. King
Vice president of AEgis simulation development group

AEgis has been developing its 3D digital modeling over the past three years, led by King and Scott Allman, director of geospatial programs. The company recently hired four additional computer modelers, the oldest a 20-year-old. The young modelers have been doing it on their own for fun for years, using freely available software from Blender.org.

Hill said the company plans to help pay for their college education while they work at AEgis.

AEgis delivered the software package to NBC last week, provided training and even did some last-minute modifications in preparation for the two weeks of coverage, Hill said.

With more than a billion people expected to follow NBC's broadcast around the world, Hill said AEgis hopes that a tiny segment of that huge audience will get curious about the technology and want to learn more.

"We certainly don't expect a huge boom in sales; it's more of an awareness of the technology and how you can use 3D visualization technology," Hill said. "If all it does is heighten people's awareness, that will be really good for us."