

Spaceport board names new CEO

Las Cruces native and NMSU alum Dan Hicks to lead

STEVE RAMIREZ

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

LAS CRUCES - The New Mexico Spaceport Authority board of directors unanimously selected Daniel Hicks as the new chief executive officer of Spaceport America.

Hicks' selection was approved Thursday during a special meeting of the New Mexico Spaceport Authority.

Hicks, 57, replaces Christine Anderson, who announced her retirement in July, after having served in the position since 2011.

"On behalf of the board, I am delighted to welcome Dan Hicks as Spaceport America's new chief executive officer. After a successful search campaign and careful consideration of several highly qualified candidates, the Search Committee recommended Dan to lead Spaceport America forward as CEO," Rick Holdridge, chairman of the Spaceport Authority's board, said in a news release. "Dan Hicks has over 34 years of experi-



Hicks

ence serving our nation as an Army civilian at U.S. Army White Sands Missile Range — the birthplace of our country's space activities and the largest overland test range with a total economic impact to New Mexico of over four million dollars a day. We expect Dan to be in place by November and look forward to working with him on the many opportunities ahead."

Hicks began his 34-year career at White Sands Missile Range in 1982 as a test conductor in the Materiel Test Directorate.

Since May 2015 he has been director of plans at WSMR. Hicks was responsible for the direct oversight of the command planning functions for the range, and he just completed "WSMR 2046," a 30-year strategic plan. As director of plans, Hicks also maintained oversight for all of WSMR's external relationships; congressional and state legislatures; federal, state, and local agencies; and other community and business stake-

holders.

From September 2013 until May 2015, Hicks was WSMR's deputy executive director. He assisted WSMR's commanding general and its executive director in the operations of the range, its more than \$11 billion in infrastructure, and approximately 12,000 personnel.

From October 2007 to September 2013, Hicks was chief of staff at WSMR.

"His experience is second to none," Holdridge said. "His business development experience is tremendous. Dan is the right guy."

A Las Cruces native, Hicks graduated from Las Cruces High School, earned his bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from New Mexico State University and received an honorary selection to the Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Academy at New Mexico State University.

"I am so excited and grateful for the opportunity to lead the great team at Spaceport America. I have always believed in Spaceport America. It is a national treasure that is important to our state's economy and our nation's commercial space industry," he said in the release.

Holdridge said there are four areas Spaceport America's board of directors want him to focus on.

"Job one is to continue to build on Spaceport America's business base," Holdridge said. "Number two is to strengthen our business relationship with Virgin Galactic (the primary tenant at Spaceport America). The third area is to engage the nearby communities and state on what the spaceport is. Job four is to the southern road (from the Upham exit off of Interstate 25 north to Spaceport America) done."

Hicks' annual salary is still to be determined, considering the New Mexico Legislature is about to meet in special session to determine remedies for a budget shortfall. But Holdridge said he believes Hicks' salary could be slightly more than \$127,000.

Davin Lopez, president and chief executive officer of the Mesilla Valley Economic Development Alliance, said he

was impressed with Hicks' qualifications.

"It's very important to have someone with knowledge and experience in economic development and economic development needs," said Lopez, who also serves on Spaceport America's board. "Him having that understanding impressed me and is important to Spaceport America."

Las Cruces Laura Conniff, who is also on Spaceport America's board, added, "For me, Dan's community involvement and knowledge of the state makes a huge difference."

Spaceport America board member Nathan Lafont said Hicks understands the community and government relationships that need to be maintained with research and development testing. Sometimes, details about some of those programs can't be immediately shared publicly because of proprietary details.

As commercial spaceflight technology continues to emerge, and further research and development is conducted at Spaceport America — similar to military research, development and testing that has happened at WSMR — Hicks' experience with those issues will be vital.

"We need somebody with a government background to help us with that concept," Lafont said.

Hicks was chosen from more than 20 applicants for the position.