SAN DIEGO, Jul 12, 2006 (PRIMEZONE via COMTEX News Network) -- Employees at Northrop Grumman Corporation's (NYSE:NOC) newest production facility in Moss Point, Miss., are adding RQ-4 Global Hawk unmanned air vehicle fuselage subassemblies to their manufacturing portfolio.

Just two years after breaking ground on its Unmanned Systems Center, Northrop Grumman installed Global Hawk tooling just in time for the facility's grand opening in April this year. Despite destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina, construction remained on schedule and on June 6, the Unmanned Systems Center crew began loading parts into the assembly jig for the 17th Global Hawk to enter production since the program began in 1995.

Global Hawk's fuselage consists of three pieces: forward-section, mid-section and aft-section. Those metallic sections will be built and mated in Moss Point. Some of the equipment provisions and the smaller composite part installations will also be completed at the Unmanned Systems Center.

The first Miss.-built fuselage is scheduled to ship from Moss Point to the primary Global Hawk manufacturing center in Palmdale, Calif., in early 2007 for final assembly and testing. There are currently seven Global Hawks in Palmdale in various stages of production.

The arrival of Global Hawk subassembly work continues Northrop Grumman's commitment to help the local community grow and prosper in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

"Northrop Grumman specifically chose Moss Point, Miss., for the fuselage assembly of Global Hawk and for the manufacture of the Fire Scout unmanned air vehicles," said Gary Ervin, sector vice president of Northrop Grumman's Integrated Systems Western Region. "This assembly plant reduces overall cost on the programs and brings many jobs to the area."

At the facility's ribbon-cutting ceremony last month, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour commented, "This is a great facility with cutting-edge technology and high pay for employees. This is Northrop Grumman making an emphatic statement - 'We believe in the future of the Gulf Coast.'"

Sen. Trent Lott added, "Northrop Grumman has chosen to build the best unmanned aerial vehicles in the world here in Jackson County, Miss., and we are very appreciative."

Currently, a dozen people support the Global Hawk program in Moss Point, joining more than 20 others now supporting the Navy and Army MQ-8B Fire Scout programs. At full-production rate, the plant will be able to support the build of three Global Hawk fuselages at one time. The production capacity can be expanded according to customer demand.

The Global Hawk system features an unmanned aerial vehicle that flies at altitudes up to 60,000 feet above inclement weather and prevailing winds. Global Hawk can survey vast geographic regions with pinpoint accuracy. After mission parameters are programmed into Global Hawk, it can take off, fly its mission and land autonomously.

To date, deployed Global Hawks have flown more than 6,000 combat hours in more than 260 missions in support of the war on terrorism.

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Northrop Grumman Corporation is a global defense company headquartered in Los Angeles, Calif. Northrop Grumman provides technologically advanced, innovative products, services and solutions in systems integration, defense electronics, information technology, advanced aircraft, shipbuilding and space technology. With more than 120,000 employees and operations in all 50 states and 25 countries, Northrop Grumman serves U.S. and international military, government and commercial customers.

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