

# Mississippi Enterprise for Technology

## John C. Stennis Space Center



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BUILDING WORKFORCE, BUILDING BUSINESS

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## Geocent LLC

# Responding to change

*Whether working with  
the Pentagon or NASA, a  
company has to be fleet  
of foot to get ahead...*

It's one thing to be interviewed for a story in a trade publication, and especially nice if your company is used as an example of an agile company responding to the changing needs of the Pentagon.

But landing on the front cover to illustrate the topic? That's quite a feather.

"I had no idea," Keith Alphonso said about landing on the cover of Washington Technology magazine.

Alphonso, chief technology officer for Mississippi Enterprise for Technology (MsET) member Geocent LLC was on the cover of the February 2010 issue of the magazine for government contractors. He was interviewed for a story headlined, "Agility Key to Thriving in New Defense Market," which focused on contractors adjusting strategies to meet new priorities of the defense market. Geocent was chosen as an example.

Geocent is based in New Orleans, but Alphonso has been a fixture at NASA's Stennis Space Center for years. He arrived when Geocent predecessor, Diamond Data Systems, opened a small operation at the the Mississippi Army Ammu-



*Photo courtesy of Geocent*

Keith Alphonso of Geocent had no idea he'd wind up on the cover of Washington Technology when he was interviewed.

tion Plant. Today it has 17 people at Stennis and is a subsidiary of Geocent, created through a merger of the information technology expertise of Diamond Data and the aerospace and defense expertise of Precient Technologies. Agility remains a cornerstone.

"That is definitely one of our focuses. We put everything down to answering the customer's needs," said Alphonso. He pointed out that the motto of Diamond Data was that "failure is not an option."

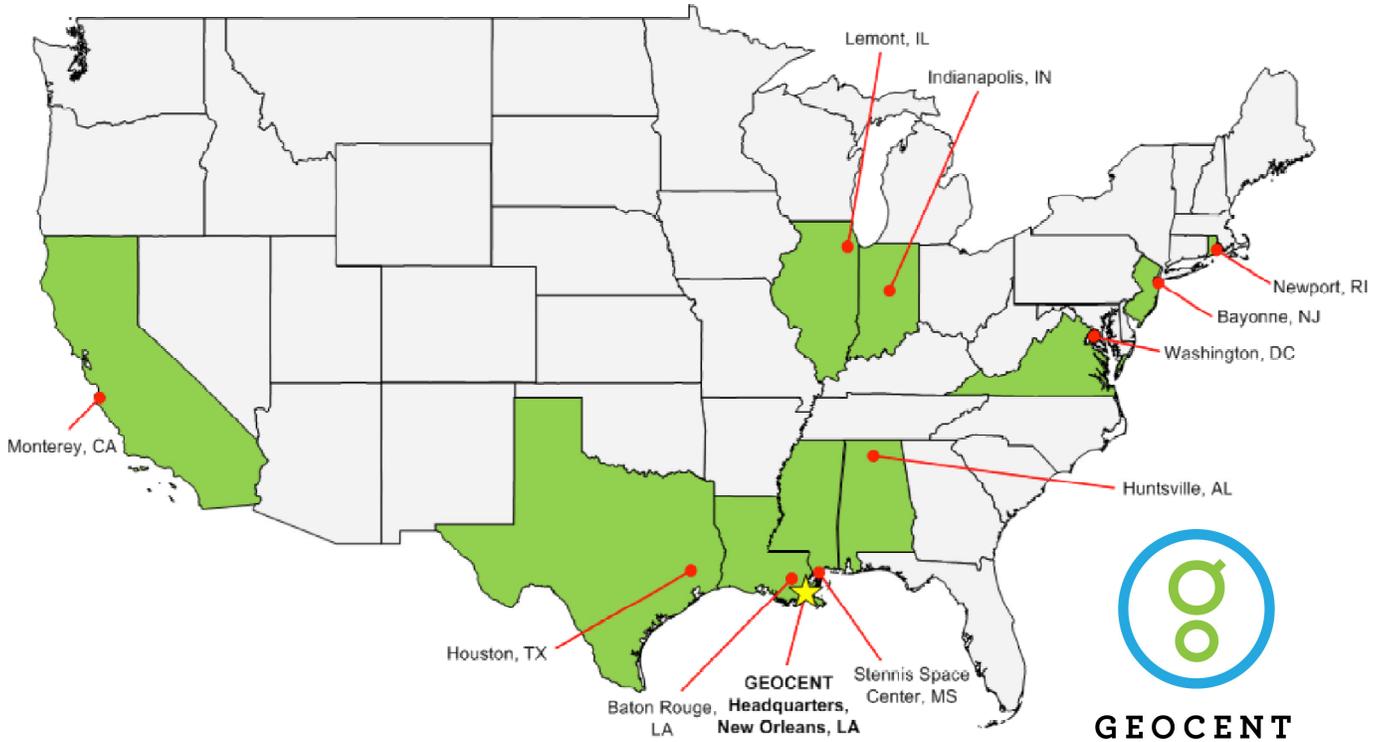
### Roots in a merger

Geocent is a woman-owned small business that provides products to federal, state, local,

and commercial customers. It has 136 employees and operations in Baton Rouge, La.; Monterey, Calif.; Houston, Texas; Lemont, Ill.; Indianapolis, Ind.; Huntsville, Ala.; Washington, D.C.; Bayonne, N.J. and Newport, R.I. as well as New Orleans and Stennis.

Over half its personnel have security clearances and provide services that include software engineering and custom application development and support for clients ranging from small commercial corporations to large, complex federal and state agencies.

Geocent was formed in 2008, but its roots go back to 1992 and the creation of the New



**GEOCENT**

Orleans-based information technology company Diamond Data Systems. In the fall of 1999, it acquired National Computer Services and opened an office at Stennis with one significant customer: the Naval Oceanographic Office.

In the fall of 2000, Diamond Data became a member of the Mississippi Enterprise for Technology’s incubator program and moved into office space in Building 1103. Its scope of business widened to include projects supporting the Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command, NASA and the Veterans Administration. In 2007 it graduated from the incubator.

Geocent became a member of MsET after it was created, and by 2009 it outgrew the original MsET office space on the first floor of Building 1103. In 2010 it moved to the second floor.

**Quick on its feet**

Alphonso said that companies in the business of connecting objects and people will do well in the future. It’s an age dominated by the need for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

“A big problem for the Defense Department has been these large, five- to eight-year programs – big ticket items that take forever to develop,” Alphonso said in the

*Washington Technology* article. With the shift in focus from conventional wars to non-state adversaries, the move now is toward more “agile development.” Speed in bringing new technologies to the field is crucial. Alphonso said Geocent is building more agility into its software development programs, and delivering products in as little as two weeks to a month.

The initial DDS projects were Generic Acoustic Prediction, used to produce horizontal contours of ocean temperature, sound speed and salinity, and the Geophysical Fleet Mission Program Library, which includes applications for acoustics, meteorology, electromagnetic, hazard avoidance and oceanography for use by fleet air, surface, amphibious and undersea warfare operations.

Those led to more projects, including teaming with the University of New Orleans on a Small Business Innovative Research project to develop algorithms and software for Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) products. It also became a Northrop Grumman subcontractor on the Naval Meteorology and Oceanography Command’s IT contract at Stennis.

**Award winner**

Geocent has a long list of awards.

It was selected by the newsweekly *New Orleans CityBusiness Magazine* as one of the “Best Places to Work” five of the last six years. In 2009 it won from the magazine a silver award as an “Innovator of the Year” for its Anti-Submarine Visual Analysis Tool.

Geocent created the web-based system to process increasingly larger volumes of meteorological and oceanographic data to help the Navy’s anti-submarine efforts. The information helps identify potential areas where enemy subs might be able to evade sonar detection.

Geocent also was recognized in 2006 by *PC Magazine* as one of America’s Top 20 small business technology companies.

Northrop Grumman picked Geocent to receive the 2008 World Class Team Supplier Award for support of Northrop Grumman programs.

The company also received the “Best Application of Technology” e-award from Greater New Orleans Inc. The Louisiana Technology Council, an organization dedicated to advancing economic and social development through technology, named Geocent the “Growth Company of the Year” in 2009.

– David Tortorano



## The MsET story



*Tortorano Publications photo*

**T**he Mississippi Enterprise for Technology Inc. at John C. Stennis Space Center is a nonprofit created in 1994 as a business incubator and technology transfer office. The joint effort of the Mississippi Development Authority, NASA and the state's universities was designed to spawn the development of high-wage, high-skill technology jobs.

MsET evolved into one of the first state groups to focus on leveraging the presence of federal geospatial activities, the gathering, interpretation and distribution of geographic data acquired with satellites and aircraft to provide a picture of the world. That's no small matter considering it's a key technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It remains a key area for MsET, but by far not the only one.

### The beginning

The state's interest in leveraging federal technologies at Stennis – then called the Mississippi Test Facility – began in 1964 with creation of the Mississippi Research and Development Center. State officials knew they had a jewel in the facility designed to test rockets for NASA.

In 1970 NASA located its Earth Resources Laboratory to MTF to find applications for data acquired from remote sensing equipment. At NASA's invitation, the departments of Commerce, Interior, Transportation, Army, Navy and EPA eventually set up operations at the facility that would be

renamed John C. Stennis Space Center.

In 1994 MsET was established to fulfill the role first envisioned 30 years earlier: leveraging the research, development, test and evaluation taking place at Stennis Space Center.

### MsET today

MsET is headquartered in the 56,000-square-foot Mississippi Technology Transfer Center, designated the Center of Excellence in Geospatial Technologies. Building 1103 is also occupied by universities, nonprofits and commercial companies. MsET also has space in Building 1210 for a total of 15,000 square feet.

Its mission as an incubator and tech transfer office is to provide an environment where start-ups can turn technologies into products and services. It's a means to leverage Stennis Space Center as a catalyst to facilitate commerce, create job opportunities and improve the quality of life.

As a technology transfer office, MsET is a clearinghouse where research at Stennis, whether from federal or state labs, can be converted into products and services for the general public.

As a business incubator, MsET is a member of the National Business Incubation Association and provides an environment where technology start-ups stand a better chance at surviving through providing business and technology-related services, opportunities for joint ventures, entrepreneur

training and access to state and federal technology portfolios. It helps a startup in the critical early stages.

MsET works with a statewide network of offices to offer technology forecasts, business plans, market research, sources of financing/marketing strategies, patent searches and vendor sources.

MsET does not limit itself to a particular type of technology, and the current list of tenants includes companies involved in everything from software development to computer security systems. Long-range plans call for exploring the growth of alternative technology areas.

MsET is also currently applying additional focus on the economic development of Stennis Space Center. The incubator and technology transfer function will remain the focal point, but MsET will partner with local, state and federal organizations for the economic development of Stennis Space Center.

MsET already has a track record of getting directly involved in the economic development of Stennis. MsET in the past was instrumental in helping Stennis win the Shared Services Center in a NASA-wide competition. It wound up creating some 500 high-paying jobs.

"We need to position ourselves to be able to take advantage of opportunities," said Charles Beasley, president of MsET, "and we are now well on our way towards doing that."

# Demographics

The John C. Stennis Space Center is a key location for three of five science and technology sectors likely to play a growing role in South Mississippi's future.



## South Mississippi science & technology sectors

| Sector                         | Primary centers                      |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Aerospace</b>               | Stennis Space Center; Moss Point     |
| <b>Advanced materials</b>      | Hattiesburg; Bay St. Louis; Gulfport |
| <b>Shipbuilding</b>            | Gulfport; Pascagoula                 |
| <b>Geospatial technologies</b> | Stennis Space Center, Ocean Springs  |
| <b>Marine science</b>          | Stennis Space Center, Ocean Springs  |

Source: Mississippi Gulf Coast Alliance for Economic Development/Tcp

Stennis tenant MsET, an incubator and tech transfer operation, has a membership list of technology companies involved in a variety of fields. The companies focus on everything from providing business services to making products.

## Current MsET companies

| Company  | Field                |
|--|----------------------|
| <b>DQSI Corporation</b>                        | GIS support          |
| <b>DigitalGlobe</b>                            | Imagery products     |
| <b>Digital Quest</b>                           | Education products   |
| <b>Geocent</b>                                 | Geospatial           |
| <b>Helios Systems</b>                          | Digital media        |
| <b>Innovative Imaging and Research Corp.</b>   | Illumination; agr.   |
| <b>Melcorp</b>                                 | UAV products         |
| <b>Mississippi Global Technologies</b>         | Navigation; security |
| <b>MSU/Geosystems Research Institute</b>       | Research             |
| <b>Northrop Grumman Information Technology</b> | Emergency mgmt       |
| <b>Prototyping Solutions</b>                   | 3D printing          |
| <b>Radiance Technologies</b>                   | Geospatial           |
| <b>Rockwell Collins</b>                        | Geospatial; UAV      |
| <b>Skylla Engineering</b>                      | Engineering          |
| <b>Themis Vision Systems</b>                   | Imaging              |
| <b>USM Height Modernization Project</b>        | Geoinformatics       |
| <b>WorldWinds</b>                              | Weather modeling     |

Source: Mississippi Enterprise for Technology

### MsET tenant residency

|                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| <b>St. Tammany Parish</b>         | 20% |
| <b>Harrison County</b>            | 19% |
| <b>Hancock County</b>             | 16% |
| <b>Pearl River County</b>         | 15% |
| <b>Other Mississippi counties</b> | 12% |
| <b>Other Louisiana parishes</b>   | 12% |
| <b>Other states</b>               | 6%  |

### MsET tenant education

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| <b>Bachelors</b>   | 52% |
| <b>High school</b> | 19% |
| <b>Masters</b>     | 13% |
| <b>Associates</b>  | 11% |
| <b>PhD</b>         | 5%  |

## MsET Profile

Most MsET tenant workers live in Mississippi, but 32% are from Louisiana. Seventy percent have college degrees; add associates and it's 81%. Source: MsET

## South Mississippi federal/state geospatial research

| Organization  | Location                 |
|---|--------------------------|
| <b>Center of Higher Learning/University Research (Consortium)</b>       | Stennis                  |
| <b>Engineering &amp; Science Directorate (NASA)</b>                     | Stennis                  |
| <b>Enterprise for Innovative Geospatial Solutions (UM)</b>              | Stennis, Oxford, Jackson |
| <b>Gulf Coast Geospatial Center (USM)</b>                               | Gulfport                 |
| <b>Hydrographic Science Research Center (USM)</b>                       | Stennis                  |
| <b>Joint Airborne Lidar Bathymetry Technical Center (NOAA)</b>          | Kiln                     |
| <b>Mississippi Enterprise for Technology (Mississippi)</b>              | Stennis                  |
| <b>Mississippi Laboratory/Southeast Fisheries Science Center (NOAA)</b> | Stennis                  |
| <b>Mississippi Laboratory, Pascagoula Facility (NOAA)</b>               | Pascagoula               |
| <b>National Data Buoy Center (NOAA)</b>                                 | Stennis                  |
| <b>Naval Oceanographic Office (Navy)</b>                                | Stennis                  |
| <b>Naval Research Laboratory, Research Site (Navy)</b>                  | Stennis                  |
| <b>Northern Gulf Institute (Consortium)</b>                             | Stennis                  |

Source: Mississippi Gulf Coast Alliance for Economic Development/Tcp