

Albuquerque Business First, Feb 7, 2014, 1:00am MST

Economic Development Hub

“Senspex grows with 8(a) help”



Courtesy Senspex

Charles Gloria works on final testing for a thermal imaging camera deployment.

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From Senspex’s office off Coors Boulevard, [Janelle Anthone](#) could see people walking on the Sandia Peak Tram station.

And it was a turning point for Senspex.

The company was started in 2001 with a Small Business Innovation Research Grant to study nanotechnology. But Senspex was sinking everything it made into research and development on a chemical detection system it was designing.

Thanks to a chance meeting with a company that makes super-high resolution cameras at a trade show, Anthone, the VP of Senspex, saw a business opportunity.

“They had bought a 1,000-millimeter camera, with a germanium lens. It was huge! I said, ‘Wow. What can that do?’ And, at 18 clicks, you can see a human walking. At night,” Janelle said. “That was when I became a believer.”

But that was also when Senspex had to change course.

“We ran the numbers, and we were feeding that machine too much money. All the profits had to be sunk into R&D,” she said.

Company president and CEO [Miguel Moreno](#) didn’t really want to change course. After five years of research, he said, he didn’t want to give up the company he’d built.

And the cameras weren’t actually selling.

“When we first started cameras, I couldn’t give them away,” Anthonie said. “We were struggling.”

But, Anthonie said, that was when she discovered the [Small Business Administration’s 8\(a\)](#) program, and Senspex turned a corner. The company enrolled in the program and turned its physicists and scientists loose on the cameras and asked them to develop high-end security systems.

“It was painful,” Moreno said.

In January Senspex graduated from the 8(a) program, and the company has moved on from nanotech to building, installing security systems all over the country for the Department of Defense and private companies.

The 8(a) program helps small, minority-owned or disadvantaged firms learn the federal contracting process. Companies in the program compete for sole-source contracts, get business assistance and more over nine years.

“They were good about explaining procurement. That was all new to me,” Anthonie said. “We started down that track and that helped us get contracts.”

Those led to more contracts.

But, said Moreno, it wasn’t easy leaving research behind.

“It was painful,” he said.

The physicists on staff have added value to the security side of the business, he said.

“We still do technical development, and that’s a big part of being a specialty contractor,” said [Dave Costello](#), CTO of Senspex.

The company now has 50 full-time employees, and more than \$10 million in annual revenue. Anthonie said it’s diversifying beyond federal contracting, and into private systems.

“I want to be the next Raytheon,” Moreno said. “We are going in the right direction. We are hiring the next levels. But you have to think big.”