

Mine-clearing startup is building in Bucks County (USA)

The company which produces a device that helps keep American soldiers safe will be based on Bristol's Canal Street.

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Humanistic Robotics Inc. is building a device to make a dangerous job, clearing land mines, safer and, with \$2 million in federal funding, the startup company is planting its flag in Bucks County.

Co-founders Samuel Reeves and Joshua Koplín will base the company's research and development activities in 5,300 square feet of space on Bristol's Canal Street, where they plan to employ a dozen engineers, fabricators, welders and managers to start. More people will be hired once production begins, they said.

"This is something that will have an impact on American soldiers abroad and drive business here by putting a range of people to work," Reeves said last week.

The duo estimated 110 million anti-personnel land mines _ most not much larger than hockey pucks _ are planted in 60 foreign countries. Only about 150,000 are cleared per year, since existing methods are inefficient, they said.

Koplín estimated 80 percent of the clearing is done manually because the "glorified steamrollers" that are usually used to locate and detonate the devices cannot get to the minefields. Most third-world countries lack roads and bridges capable of accommodating the big machines, he explained.

Humanistic Robotics would use remote robotics technology to power a wheeled-device that would travel through a minefield triggering explosives as it rolls over them. The company's prototypes weigh about 1,300 pounds and can fit in the bed of a pickup truck.

The devices could sell for less than \$100,000 each, Reeves said. The "steamroller" type costs more, he said. Reeves also said the business could sell to government agencies or contractors developing roads or buildings in countries with mines.

"If they want to have a prosperous economy, these countries have to deal with their land mine problems as well," he said.

When Humanistic Robotics needed more room to fine-tune its prototype and launch production, Congressman Patrick Murphy, D-Bucks, helped it obtain \$2 million in defense appropriations funding over two years _ \$400,000 in the last fiscal year and \$1.6 million this year. The money will fund the move and pay for additional research and development work, the company co-founders said.

Murphy formally welcomed Koplín and Reeves to their new home in Bristol last week.

"We're thankful that they chose Bucks County and that they're bringing a dozen new jobs and a product that's going to save thousands of lives," he said.

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