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BlueRobotics Propels Itself to Cool Idea! Award

Proto Labs recognizes Thruster-100 system for innovation in marine mobility.

MAPLE PLAIN, MINN.—May 6, 2014—Proto Labs (NYSE: PRLB) has presented a Cool Idea! Award to the team at BlueRobotics for their development work on the Thruster-100 propulsion system for robotic marine vehicles.

BlueRobotics designed the compact Thruster-100 as a low-cost motor and propeller unit that users can affix to remotely operated underwater vehicles and small surface vessels for aquatic exploration. A plastic framework integrated with a brushless electric motor enables the thruster to operate continuously for months at a time, navigate into deep waters and resist the corrosive nature of ocean saltwater.

By drastically reducing the hardware expense typically associated with buying a thruster, the company hopes to provide a more accessible entry point for hobbyists, educators, students and professionals. “There’s a developing community of people online who are doing marine robotics projects for fun and ecological reasons and they’re all having the same problem — they don’t have an affordable underwater thruster,” says engineer and BlueRobotics co-founder, Rustom Jehangir.

Applications for marine robotics vary from studying ocean currents and temperatures to photographing reefs and sea creatures to surveying underwater wreckage. With the Thruster-100, the goal is to inexpensively power more exploration like that. “We hope the thruster will serve as a foundation for which other people can build things,” explains Joe Spadola, co-founder at BlueRobotics.

As part of the Cool Idea! Award grant from Proto Labs, the company will receive a range of thermoplastic injection-molded parts including nose, propeller, nozzle and tail cone components along with mounting brackets. BlueRobotics plans to make its Thruster-100 available to customers later this year.

“While hardware, software and information have become readily available to the rapidly expanding hobbyist robotic market, ocean exploration within that market has been limited in part by the cost and design of the thruster component. BlueRobotics has designed a product that will enable not only the hobbyist market, but the academic and commercial markets to push the current limits of marine robotics,” says Proto Labs Founder and Chairman, Larry Lukis.

Launched in 2011, the Proto Labs Cool Idea! Award gives a total of \$250,000 in services each year to entrepreneurs developing new products in the United States and Europe. Unlike other product awards that recognize products after they're in mass production and on store shelves, the Cool Idea! Award is meant to help innovative ideas come to life. For more information about the Cool Idea! Award and to apply, visit www.protolabs.com/coolidea.

About Proto Labs

Proto Labs, Inc. (NYSE: PRLB) is a leading online and technology-enabled quick-turn manufacturer of custom parts for prototyping and short-run production. Proto Labs provides "Real Parts, Really Fast" to product developers worldwide. Proto Labs uses computer numerical control (CNC) machining, injection molding, and additive manufacturing to manufacture custom parts for our customers. For more information, visit www.protolabs.com.

About BlueRobotics

BlueRobotics is a California-based team of mechanical engineers who are developing affordable technology and thruster hardware for robotic marine vehicles. For more information, visit <http://www.blue-robotics.com/>.

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