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U.S. Bank Tower's light show to debut in Sacramento

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If all goes as planned, the Sacramento skyline will debut its latest addition sometime around dusk tonight when the top of the new \$130 million U.S. Bank Tower begins to glow.

You'll see the display from any freeway or street south of Capitol Mall with an unobstructed view of the 25-story building's top.

What you won't see: the beaming pride of Kevin Furry, head of the Rancho Cordova arm of Lighting Science Group Corp., an international player in high-tech illumination.

His firm is on the leading edge of advances in light-emitting diodes. The technology, once limited to wristwatches and calculator displays, now turns high-rises into towering, energy-efficient video screens and powers the lights inside the New Year's Eve ball that drops in Times Square.

"We're basically a new industry," Furry said during a recent interview at his Rancho Cordova offices. "We're seeing breakthroughs almost as significant as when Edison created the light bulb."

The 43-year-old Furry got his start in the \$5 billion global LED industry with a miscalculation.

In 1994, he and some friends made four lava lamp-style lights for themselves. A casino, intrigued by the designs, offered to buy some. Furry sold his boat to fund the project.

"Then they backed out," Furry said. "I had 20 of these things just sitting in my house."

Undeterred, and excited by LED advances in color and intensity, Furry kept moving. His company, then known as LED Effects Inc., produced large casino displays and other electronic message boards.

The lights illuminating the Channel 10 tower on Broadway, next to the Capital City Freeway-Interstate 5 interchange, came from LED Effects.

From those beginnings, LED Effects garnered contracts big and small locally and around the world.

It made stage lighting for Feather Falls Casino in Butte County and developed the lighting system that wraps the exterior of the Chanel Boutique in Osaka, Japan. That project, using more than 125,000 white LEDs, displays animated text, videos and graphics.

The firm also built the LED-illuminated curtain wall at the base of New York City's Seven World Trade Center and assembled the new ball that dropped in Times Square on New Year's Eve.

Last year, Furry's company merged with Lighting Science Group Corp., an LED manufacturer based in Dallas. Lighting Science, with 2007 revenue of \$2.78 million, is the biggest U.S.-owned player in the industry. Furry's company assumed the buyer's name.

The massive art display at the U.S. Bank Tower, at 621 Capitol Mall, employs the latest LED technology. Santa Rosa artist Michael Hayden created the two-part concept.

The first piece, "Lumetric River," uses LED projectors installed on the roof to show a video of running water that will "flow" across the building's 80-foot-tall louvered top.

The tower's atrium continues the water theme inside, with 194 LED panels measuring 2 feet by 2 feet, each hard-wired into the building and controlled by specially designed software. It's called "The Rapids."

Hayden arranged the atrium panels to give the impression that visitors are viewing water coursing across an 80-foot expanse. Each panel has a mirrored side that will cast refracted light during the day. At night, the embedded LED projectors in each white "Chiclet" continue the flowing water theme that starts on the roof.

David S. Taylor Interests, the local development company that built U.S. Bank Tower, hasn't said how much it paid Hayden or Lighting Science. A company official confirmed it runs into "the hundreds of thousands of dollars."

The building is about 60 percent leased with contracts pending on another 20 percent. U.S. Bank, the main tenant, moved in last week. Others will move in over the coming months.

Shelly Willis, administrator of the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission's Art in Public Places, said that Hayden and Lighting Science are helping push the area's public art projects forward.

"We don't have a lot of work in new media in this city on that scale," Willis said. "This opens up innovation. It shows what's possible."

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