

Sunstream one of largest boat lift manufacturers

By **ANDREA KLEE**

Contributor

Ken Hey's move to a lake changed the direction of his life. The majority of Hey's career was spent as an engineer for Boeing. He now heads one of the world's most successful boat-lift companies, Sunstream Corporation of Renton.

Hey worked for many years in aerospace engineering. The engine mounts he designed for Boeing, he noted, prevented the engines from falling off.

Through this work, Hey accumulated five patents for his engine-mount designs. In 1996 and 1999, he won the "Top Patent of the Year" for Boeing for a "very safe, easy design," he said.

Yet it took moving to lake-front property to really shape the future of Hey's life. He had always owned boats but struggled with the mechanism that lifted the boat from the water. He decided to design a boat lift that would be easy to use, Hey said, noting that a boat lift is used to keep the boats clean and safe, a kind of garage for water vehicles.

Hey wanted his garage for boats to be easy to use, drawing the analogy that "you don't hesitate to use your car because of



Photo by David Nelson

Ken Hey, founder of Sunstream Corporation of Renton sits by one of his boat lifts which will be on display Jan. 21-30 at the Seattle Boat Show in the Washington State Stadium Exhibition Center.

the garage-door opener."

Designing the boat lift "became his passion, a hobby out of control," Hey said.

When his neighbor wanted one, Hey enlisted the help of a Boeing welder, who constructed the high-speed, hydraulic cylinder that lifts the boat out of the water.

Soon, Hey took his lift to a boat show, only expecting to

make a dozen sales. Instead, he was "swamped with orders" and the Sunstream Corporation of Renton was founded.

The corporation was founded, Hey said, to provide high customer service. He wanted to "give a type of service unknown in the boat-lift industry."

Sunstream is now the largest hydraulic boat manufacturer in the country and it is still acceler-

ating in sales, Hey said.

The corporation has expanded into designing other products such as a lift for seaplanes and canopies for boats.

"It's an engineer's dream," he said.

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