



- Life Long Island Resident
- Experienced
- Knowledgeable

Associate Broker 206-232-5483
Visit www.houseflip.com
"Your Real Estate Resource"

- Ethical
- Enthusiastic
- Makes for proven RESULTS!

Windermere

Sunstream: building a better boat launch

Ingenuity, engineering led to the creation of company

By DeAnn Rossetti
Mercer Island Reporter

Ken Hey loves living on the water and boating on Lake Washington.

His dream, he says, was to "buzz around town" via his boat, shopping, eating and working on the water nearly 24 hours a day. But after several bouts with a cumbersome boat lift — the device that moves a boat from the dock or launch onto the water — he was disillusioned about boating.

"My wife and I moved into a waterfront home in Seattle and we ended up using it as a view home and not a lake home," he said. "Our boat lift was so slow and awkward we used the boat only when we had several hours to go out. I'd watch the sunset from the dock, instead of from my boat."

Hey thought a better boat lift could be his ticket to enjoying the waterfront lifestyle.

With degrees in mechanical engineering from Cornell University, as well as experience in aircraft engineering from McDonnell Douglas and Boeing, he set out building a better launch.

"I put my aerospace ingenuity to work, and a year later I'd designed the Sunlift," he said.

Hey wanted a lift that took five minutes or less to launch the boat, and that worked using remote, like a garage door opener. He wanted a high level of reliability and a lift that used high-speed hydraulic mechanisms to lock in the up position so the boat wouldn't drop. He also wanted it to be easy to load and unload the boat from the lift.



Maria Stornick/Mercer Island Reporter

Inventor and CEO of his company Sunstream Corp., Ken Hey, far right, stands with his wife, Deborah, their contractor, Eric Beckes, and their dog, Daisy, at the site of their future home on Mercer Island complete with a boat launch of the design that Hey invented.

Concerned about the environmental impact of his product, Hey made it work by solar power, and he also made sure the liquid (called "Sunfluid") that keeps the hydraulics working is water-soluble and safe for the environment.

A welder moonlighting from Boeing made the first Sunlift in his garage, and delivered it to the excited Hey.

"It did exactly what I thought it would do; it opened up the lake for us," he said. "We were out there every night, and explored every nook and cranny of Lake Union."

HEY'S NEIGHBORS noticed the ease with which he got

his boat in and out of the dock, and asked him to build one for them.

"The next phase is when you shift from focus on the product to becoming a business," said Hey. "My wife, Debra, co-founded the business and we wrote up a business plan on the back of an envelope. We planned to go to the 1997 Seattle Boat Show and sell five boat lifts, which would pay for the booth. We ended up with orders for 50 of them."

Hey and his wife realized that having someone manufacture the lifts in his garage would take too much time, so they partnered with the Monroe Penicillinary Systems, which had welders and a 10,000

'We wrote up a business plan on the back of an envelope.'

Ken Hey
INVENTOR AND CEO OF
SUNSTREAM

square-foot facility that would be clean of "mixed" metals and only produce the aluminum needed to make the boat lifts.

"Within 90 days we had kept our promise to the customers at the boat show," said Hey. "Word of

mouth spread, and we haven't slowed down since."

AFTER THAT, Hey created lifts for everything from float planes (Sunstream Floatlift) to jet skis (the Dock Lock) and dock canopies, all with features that made them popular enough to propel the Kent company to \$7.5 million in revenue per year.

"We are the 12th fastest growing company in the Northwest," Hey said. "We more than double in size each year. We are the technological leader in the industry and the largest hydraulic lift manufacturer in the world. We are on track to be the largest boat lift company in the world."

Sunstream just completed its first stock offering to fund growth internally, a success that is, according to Hey, very rare, post 9/11.

A LONG ISLAND, N.Y., native, Hey graduated from the executive MBA program at the University of Washington, where he now teaches strategies in building companies. He moved to Southern California after graduation to design planes for Douglas Aircraft, a division of McDonnell Douglas Corp.

He began what he called "the first failed dot-com company," Innovision, and after it closed in 1990, moved to Seattle and sold Boeing five patents for engine mount designs for its 777 series of airplanes. Hey was awarded Ernst and Young's Northwest Entrepreneur of the Year award in 2000 and the Thomas Alva Edison Award for Innovation from the Edison Foundation.

Currently, the Heys are building a house on the south end of Mercer Island. They've already sold 100 Sunlifts to Island residents and look forward to starting a family in a community-oriented environment.

"Both of us grew up in small towns, and Mercer Island is a great community," he said. They were married at Mercer Island United Methodist Church and are members.

"We have gotten somewhat involved in the community, and hope to do more in the future," he said.

Because Sunstream Corp. has evolved so quickly, Hey notes that his dream of practically living on the water hasn't come any closer.

"The cruel irony is that after developing the Sunlift and the company taking off, we don't have as much time for boating as we'd like," Hey said. "But we both look forward to the days we can get back out there on the lake."

Sunstream lifts range in price from \$6,000 to \$10,000. Sunstream can be contacted at 888-786-5438, or by visiting the Web site at www.sunlift.com.