

## **Military demand for hydraulic boat lifts increases Kent company's sales**

The King County Journal

The increasing use of smaller, swifter boats by military services and by federal agencies protecting America's coasts is bringing a surge in business to a Kent-based company that builds hydraulic boat lifts.

Sunstream Boat Lifts has just won a \$1.7 million contract to produce 30 or more of its floating hydraulic boat lifts for the U.S. Navy.

U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, helped win approval for the contract in a Department of Defense funding bill.

Sunstream manufactures hydraulic lifts that float on large pontoons.

They essentially replace stationary dry-docks and can be towed and moored anywhere to quickly and easily lift vessels out of the water for hull cleaning and other light maintenance.

Murray, visiting the area Friday during the congressional recess, toured Sunstream's headquarters and plant at 22149 68th Ave. S.

Sunstream currently has 43 employees. The federal contract will mean a dozen new jobs for the company and its suppliers, company officials told Murray.

"I'm confident there will be more contracts for these floating lifts in the future," Murray said.

Sunstream already has sold some of its FloatLift models to the Navy, U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Customs. There's a sudden demand because the military and federal agencies are using more smaller and swifter craft to patrol America's coasts and harbors, said Ken Hey, owner and CEO of Sunstream.

The lifts also can be used for "response boats" used to deal with oil spills, Coast Guard rescue craft and vessels used by federal agencies to check suspicious craft for smuggling.

Besides saving time and maintenance costs, the lifts also can be easily used to keep boats out of salt water when not in use. That prolongs the life of vessels and eliminates the need for toxic "bottom paint" to prevent growth of barnacles or algae on hulls, Hey said.

"That means the boats will last longer," Hey said. "This saves the Navy money, makes them more efficient and helps the environment."

Sunstream was founded 10 years ago, manufacturing lifts for recreational boats.

A popular floating lift model for a pleasure boat up to 25 feet long costs about \$12,000. Free-standing models, used at the shoreline of lakefront homes, are \$6,000 to \$8,000.

Hey, a Mercer Island resident, said there are more than 1,000 of the company's lifts at homes and marinas around Lake Washington.

The larger models for the military can lift up to 13,000 pounds, meaning they can be used for Navy or Coast Guard response boats about 30 to 40 feet in length.

Hey said U.S. Customs officers also have used the floating lifts to hoist "suspicious boats" out of the water to check them over.

Smugglers have been known to attach packages of drugs or other contraband to boat hulls.

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