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Fifty years' innovation drives HydroHoist's Claremore operations

CLAREMORE – Standing in a huge storage facility where new products manufactured by HydroHoist Marine Group are readied for shipment to marine distributors across the nation, it suddenly occurred to me that there was no water in sight.

So I turned to HydroHoist CEO Mick Webber and asked him how one of the world's most innovative marine manufacturers thrives in land-locked Oklahoma.

"People have this notion that Oklahoma is dry and full of weeds sitting on the plains and all that. It actually couldn't be any better," Webber said. "There are huge markets to the south in Texas, which is a boating market. The market to the north is Missouri. North Carolina, New York and California all equidistant. So we're right here in the middle."

HydroHoist began its journey to become an Oklahoma success story more than five decades ago with a need to lift and store a boat out of the water on Oklahoma's Grand Lake.

Founder Henry Rutter was inspired to create a mechanism that consisted of inverted fiberglass tubs placed beneath the hull and filled with air to lift the boat. Rutter called his invention the HydroHoist. He was awarded his first patent in 1964.

HydroHoist Marine Group has since become a premier boat lift manufacturer, operating in three divisions that expand its reach far beyond water-related industries. HydroHoist boat lifts have evolved into a sophisticated method of boat care that is used worldwide.

The company's HyPower division provides a line of power pedestals suited for marina and RV applications. And its RotoMoldUSA operation provides plastic rotomolding services for HydroHoist and several Fortune 100 companies ranging from pharmaceutical to transportation to agriculture.

HydroHoist owns five patents relating to boat-lift technology and electric power pedestals, and claims International Organization for Standardization (ISO) certifications for its manufacturing processes.

A Claremore native, Webber began working for HydroHoist during the summers as a high school student. He was hired as sales representative, and



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BIO MATTERS

progressed through sales, marketing, then to chief operating officer, and eventually became president and CEO.

Webber took an ownership stake in the company in 2006, and in May of this year completed purchase of the business. Today, the company employs 75 people in Oklahoma and at five regional offices in Texas, Tennessee, Missouri and California. Two mechanical engineers drive its research and development.

"We really listen to our customers, we listen to our dealer accounts and we listen to our regional managers," Webber said. "They really direct the product needs for the future."

Through an \$89,000 matching Oklahoma Applied Research Support (OARS) grant, the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology is facilitating development of recyclable plastic trays that expand the company's reach into the agriculture industry. The trays are designed to replace wooden trays currently used by commercial mushroom growers.

HydroHoist also participates in OCAST's Intern Partnership, and employs a student from the University of Tulsa through the cost-sharing program. And innovation keeps happening at HydroHoist as its product line grows. Other products include:

- In-ground storm shelters.
- A product to reduce wind drag and reduce fuel consumption on semi-trucks.
- Sturdy pallets for the pharmaceutical industry.
- An improved free-floating port for personal watercraft.

Three major product releases are planned for 2016. And last week the company completed acquisition of a North Carolina-based salt-water marine company called Tidewater Boat Lifts.

"We want to innovate, and we want to lead and dominate the market," Webber said.

Jim Stafford writes about Oklahoma innovation and research and development topics on behalf of the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science & Technology.