

FEATURE: SNAKE RIVER BOAT BUILDERS

Unique Program, Unusual Location



Aluminum boat builders are poised to make an impact in Europe. Representing all types of aluminum craft, the Snake River Boat Builders showed their wares to a German journalist in June. Buyers are invited to follow in November.

The Lewis-Clark Valley may not seem to have anything in common with the marine industry, but spanning a portion of the Snake River the twin cities of Lewiston, Idaho, and Clarkston, Washington, are home to a cluster of welded aluminum jet-boat manufacturers. While known to the locals of the intermountain west, news of their quality products had not spread far and wide. Thanks to a program initiated by the Clearwater Economic Development (CEDA) and a grant from the USDA's rural development program, the Snake River Boat Builders Export Program is up and running. CEDA's first move was to hire Gary White of P'Chelle International, who is experienced in development and marketing of industrial clusters, such as Washington State's wineries.


Working with Janet Bauermeister of the Commercial Service in Spokane, Washington, the

pair set up to analyze the market, identify funding and explore program options to create a specific market—the European Union—for the aluminum boats outside the U.S. Eight boat builders have signed up for the program, including: Bentz Boats, Custom Weld Boats, Hells Canyon Marine, Phantom Jet Boats, Renaissance Marine Group, SJX Jet Boats, Riddle Marine, Thunder Jet and Gateway Trailers.

“We do what these companies cannot do on their own,” says White. “In addition to finding financial resources, identifying outlets and marketing, we set up training for them on such important things as how to qualify for a CE mark, packing, shipping, licensing and protecting intellectual property rights.”

The Snake River program got its first boost

during June when the editor-in-chief of a popular German boating magazine and a member of the U.S. Commercial Services from Frankfurt, Germany, paid a three-day visit to the participating builders. During the first week of November, a group of qualified European boat buyers will visit Lewiston/Clarkston after the Fort Lauderdale Boat Show to tour the facilities of the participating companies and hopefully form relationships, said White. Finally, the Snake River Boat Builders will have their own pavilion at boot Düsseldorf 2011 (January 22-30), which is one of the world's largest shows.

“We think we are developing a unique business model, but one that can be transportable to other areas of the marine industry,” said white. For more information, visit snakeriverboats.com or pchelle.com. 

By MARILYN MOWER