

# INNOVATION DESTINATION

*FOUR COMPANIES SPARK AN INTEREST FROM INTERNATIONAL  
MARKETS FROM RIGHT IN OUR BACKYARD.*

*By Suzanne Wentley  
Photography By Robert Holland*



**T**here was a push a few years ago to rename the Treasure Coast as the Research Coast – but with the influx of successful, international businesses calling Stuart home, the new moniker doesn't cut it. What about calling our area the Innovation Coast? The Export Coast? Doesn't "You Could Pick Anywhere, Choose This Coast" have a nice ring to it?

It does to many business owners who started and expanded their companies right here in Martin County, even though their products have national and international appeal. Lured by our beautiful beaches, relaxed lifestyle and strategic proximity to ports and big cities, this coast is becoming a magnet for economic growth.



Let us help you to guide the way.

- Writing a business plan
- Zoning and permitting
- Business Tax Receipt
- Workforce Development
- Employer Requirements
- Small Business Providers
- Business Assistance Programs



To find out how the Business Development Board can help your small business or to get your own copy of the *small business resource guide*, contact us today.



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A man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a blue button-down shirt, is smiling and standing in front of an F-18 Navy aircraft. The aircraft's tail fin and part of its fuselage are visible behind him. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds.

## PLANNING TO EXPAND TENFOLD WITHIN THE YEAR

**F**ROM SENSORS ALERTING users of maintenance needs for their refrigerators to air turbines on F-18 Navy aircrafts that help jam enemy radar communications, the products developed by ATGI are nothing if not innovative.

This research-and-development firm, based on Gran Park Way in Stuart, was kick-started with a government program known as Small Business Innovation Research, or SBIR. That program offers small businesses the opportunity to receive substantial grants in exchange for developing needed technology that has both government and commercial appeal.

"Once I knew there were avenues for direct proposals to the government to develop technology, I knew that was going to be my starting point," says John Justak, ATGI's founder and president. "Now within 12 months, we'll be 10 times the income we are now."

That's because ATGI, which stands for Advanced Technologies Group, Inc., has developed a wide range of products, with a focus on jet engine improvements. It has developed hydrodynamic seals shown to improve efficiency by 20 percent, a product originally created for the Department of Defense but now marketed to commercial manufacturers of large engines.

Founded in 1997, ATGI also created an optimal mask gauge sensor, which uses lasers to alert NASA engineers to the remaining amount of fuel left in a rocket while in zero gravity.

And the latest effort of Justak and his 13 employees is with ram air turbines, which are installed under F-18 Navy aircraft and use passing airflow to produce energy that powers the "jammer." The turbine is a crucial development in the government's intelligence and surveillance work.

It's the brainy, think-tank stuff that excites Justak, who previously worked in research and development for Pratt & Whitney before starting his own firm. Today, he holds 13 patents while ATGI was recently named one of the "50 Top Companies to Watch in Florida" by *Florida Trend's NEXT*. His company also received the Florida Governor's Business Diversification Award for innovation and was honored with the national Tibbetts Award for economic impact of technological innovation by the Small Business Administration.

And while he could locate his company anywhere, he and his family are happy to live near where Justak went to college at the old Florida Institute of Technology in Jensen Beach.

"The east coast of Florida and Stuart was just the ideal place for family and weather," Justak says, while doing business in Minneapolis, Houston, Paris,





// WE'RE READY TO HIT THE MASS MARKET. //

- EDDIE KOLOS



# H2Ocean

PUTTING THE OCEAN'S HEALTH  
BENEFITS TO MOTION

**A** **SURFER, FISHERMAN AND DIVER**, Eddie Kolos always appreciated the healing powers of the ocean. So he came up with an idea that was simply brilliant: Sell it.

Ten years ago, Kolos patented a sterilized mixture of salt and water and started H2Ocean, a company that now has 13 different all-natural, patented sea-salt-based health care products available for sale throughout the nation.

"There are over 82 trace elements found in sea salt. It has natural healing properties," says Scott Stier, the company's executive director of operations and Kolos' college roommate. "Our goal is to be a household name across the country for natural first aid for your family."

H2Ocean, which is headquartered in a 47,000-square-foot facility in Palm City, produces sea salt mouthwash, nasal spray, first aid spray for tattoos and piercing after-care, and a healing product for pets. The line's diabetic wound care product was approved by the American Podiatric Medical Association.

The products can be found in 26 Walgreens stores throughout the Treasure Coast, and the close-knit executive team is already planning a much larger distribution. They are also planning an infomercial and finishing up a major clinical trial.

The company was recently named one of the "Top 50 Companies to Watch in Florida" by *Florida Trend's* NEXT and won the Small Business of the Year Award by the Business Development Board of Martin County.

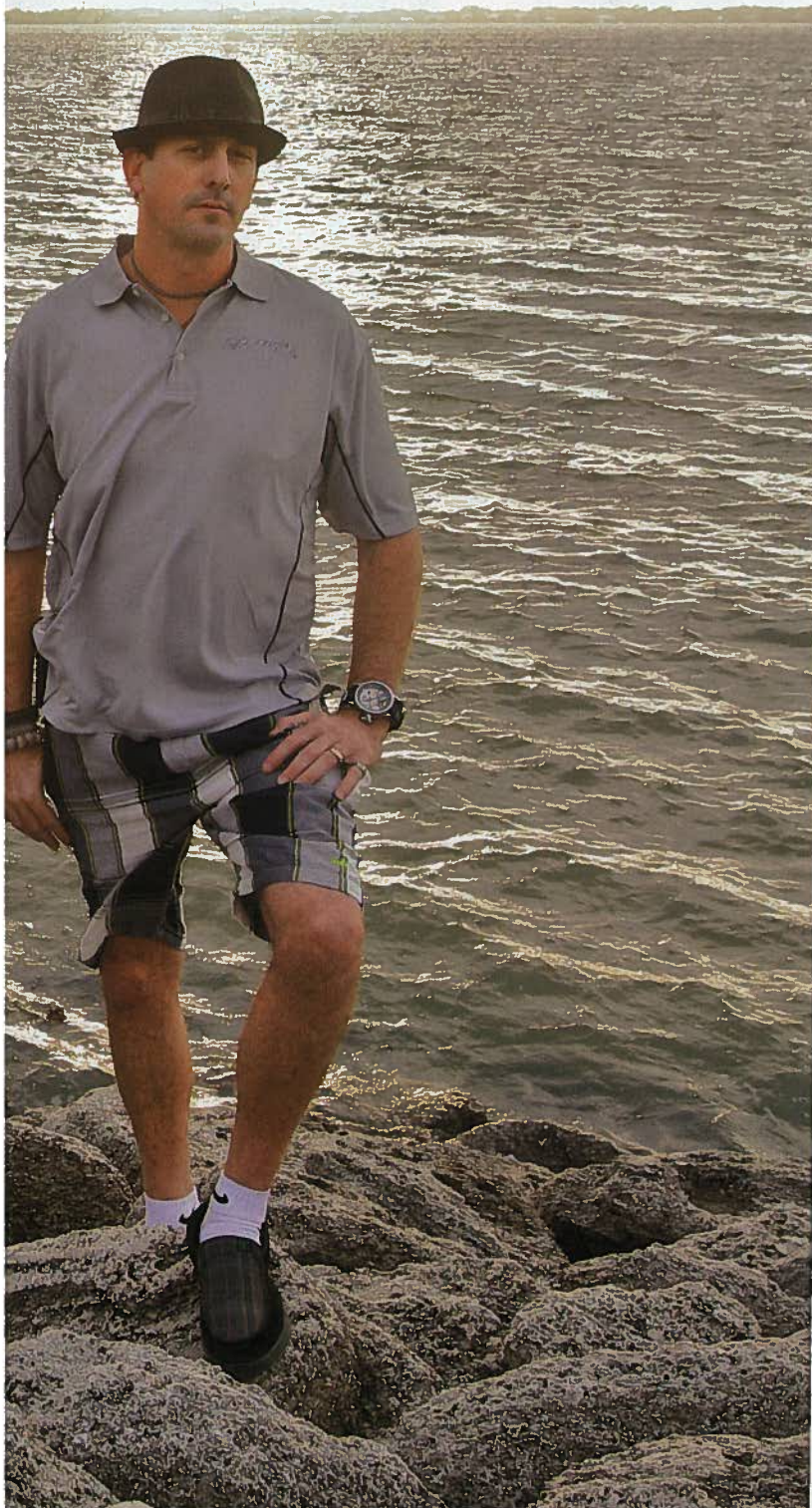
With 30 employees and distribution centers in Miami, Tampa, North Carolina and Georgia, Kolos decided to move his company to Stuart after they outgrew their facility in Boynton Beach. He knew about Stuart from surfing trips and loved the "natural, beachy feel" of the area.

He uses his experience of previously working for Australian Gold sun care products to market his line.

"These are remedies people know about that are good for colds, sore throats and allergies," Kolos says. "We're ready to hit the mass market."

Not surprisingly, H2Ocean also strives to be a green company. They installed more than 100 solar panels on their roof, use recycled packaging, natural ingredients and ozone-free sprays with "bag in a can" technology to keep the products' enzymes shelf-stable for up to five years.

That's pretty high-tech for something that's based on what Stier calls "grandma's recipe."







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I'M PROUD WE'VE  
GROWN AND DOUBLED  
REVENUE EVERY  
YEAR FOR THE LAST  
FIVE YEARS. //

- JANA STOLPER



# Seatorque Control Systems

## PROPELLING YACHTS INTO THE NEXT CENTURY

**E**VEN THOUGH UP TO 95 PERCENT of their business is international exports, Jana and Peter Stolper consider Stuart a perfect place to center their business, Seatorque Control Systems. But then, that's what happens when you move from Rhode Island.

"It's really cold up there!" laughs Jana Stolper, the company's president. "We decided to move to Florida, and I contacted all the chambers of commerce from Orlando to West Palm. We eventually stumbled upon Stuart. We found out what a hub it was for the marine industry and what a beautiful area it was in general."

So they moved the business to a 14,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility on Monroe Street in Stuart, where they manufacture propulsion systems for large yachts that are designed to improve efficiency and increase ease of installation and use. The lab-like manufacturing plant, run with 15 employees, is filled with expensive, computer-run equipment that ensures perfection with every assembly.

The couple started the business in 1985, when Jana was working in venture capital and met Peter, whose fluid dynamic design resulted in a patented technology to remove friction on the surface of the

haul. The couple married and started a boat building and manufacturing business.

But they soon found a niche market in developing complete drive line units for large marine vessels that eliminated noise and vibration, reduced fuel consumption and offered easier maintenance. The BOSS Enclosed Shaft System (that stands for Bolt On Shaft System) had international appeal, and the company won the Dame Award for design excellence and the Ibex Innovation Award for innovative design. They also distribute the Quickcutter, a line cutter produced out of Australia.

Because the interest is so great for their unique products, they've set up company divisions in the United Kingdom and China, as well as service centers in Egypt, South Africa, Brazil, Taiwan and northwestern Vancouver.

But Stuart remains home, thanks to the proximity of Miami and Fort Lauderdale, as well as the support of the Business Development Board. They recently won the Export Excellence Award from the state of Florida.

"I'm proud we've grown and doubled revenue every year for the last five years," Jana says. "There are niches in different markets, and you have to be diligent to stay on top of them."





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THE ONLY THING  
NOT MADE HERE  
ARE THE THINGS  
THAT ARE MOLDED,  
AND WE OWN THE  
MOLDS. //

— JANIE VALLERY

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Made in the U.S.







# Armstrong Nautical Products

*PROVIDING SAFETY AND EFFICIENCY FROM THE CAROLINAS TO DUBAI*

**T**HE PLANT WAS LITERALLY HUMMING off Commerce Avenue in south Stuart, as workers were cutting, welding, sanding and painting highly sought-after products for boat builders and owners throughout the world.

"The only thing not made here are the things that are molded, and we own the molds," says Janie Vallery, the president of Armstrong Nautical Products, while overlooking her 10,000-square-foot facility.

Her 30-employee company, which she runs along with the vice president, Russ Sedlack, produces three main products: large metal brackets that connect outboard motors to boats, a variety of nautical ladders designed especially for safety and ease of use, and a patented design of watertight deck plates.

Vallery purchased the marine division from Armstrong International in 1990 and worked to create markets for their products everywhere from North Carolina to Jacksonville, from Italy to Dubai. Stuart's proximity to ports, its boat-building industry and the lack of state income tax made her want to keep her business local.

But the company has an international focus: A few years ago, the international Marine Exhibition & Trade Show in Amsterdam honored them with an award for safety for its design of an open-sided ladder that made it easy and safe for divers, swimmers and snorkelers to climb back aboard, even in fins.

Some of their ladders are designed to fit over the inflatable "rib" boats, while others are telescopic and can fold up into a smart compartment on deck.

But their main specialty is the bracket. Customers provide photos, dimensions and other information so that each bracket can be custom-designed to fit perfectly and color-matched to look great. Studies show brackets increase fuel efficiency, and they provide a safe platform for diving or recreation.

The watertight deck plate, another main product, was created originally to provide an access point on their brackets without adding water inside, which would cause the vessel to lose buoyancy. When they designed it back in the early '90s, a watertight deck plate didn't exist on the market.

"We listen to the customers and try to figure out how to solve their problems," Sedlack says.

And their ear reaches internationally: They already export to 41 countries for 21 percent of their business, and they plan to increase those numbers soon – providing Stuart an even bigger global reach.





# A TOAST *To The* FUTURE

*THE **BUSCH FAMILY** LOOKS AHEAD AS IT PASSES THE  
REINS OF ITS BEVERAGE BUSINESS WITHIN THE FAMILY.*

*By Sandra Benavides*