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Boat protection for peace of mind

Kaderabeks offer storage facility, wireless security systems to owners

By Charlie Mathews

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MANITOWOC — Tracy and Dan Kaderabek are big dreamers.

With headquarters in the City Centre Industrial Park, adjacent to the Manitowoc River on "the peninsula," the couple owns Boatworx, a storage facility, and Guardian Wireless, featuring various wireless security systems.

The Kaderabeks can help protect yachts from harsh winter weather, intruders or power loss.

Now, they want to help owners reduce the cost of diesel fuel by converting animal fat to fuel, at about \$2 a gallon versus \$3.40.

That is the basic business equation of their third and newest company — Bioblend Fuels.

"With prices being what they are, people are looking at alternative sources of fuel," said Dan Kaderabek, 45, a native of Branch.

He's ready to pilot a tanker barge from Anamax's food by-product recycling facility in Green Bay to their 56,000-square-foot heated storage facility on 16th Street.

The barge could hold a million gallons of meat-packing plant fat, go through a "transesterification" process, and turn it into biodiesel fuel to power boats or vehicles with diesel engines, like Tracy's pickup truck.

"I had a banker tell me he didn't know whether the process that produces biodiesel really works. I felt like grabbing him by his tie and dragging him to my 2001 Ford F350," said the Mukwonago native, who married Dan Kaderabek in 1993.

Trouble getting a loan

"Getting funding for anything around here is very hard, if not impossible," Dan said.



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Yachts, trawlers and other boats have a winter home at Boatworx in Manitowoc. *Eric Young/HTR*
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Dan and Tracy Kaderabek

- Dan, 45, and Tracy, 38, own Boatworx, Guardian Wireless, and want to get Bioblend Fuels up and running.
- The Cleveland couple has been in the boat storage business for 16 years, the last 10 on "the peninsula," adjacent to the Manitowoc River.
- They opened their 56,000-square-foot, heated storage facility in 2004.
- This past winter, about 80 owners had their vessels in storage with Boatworx, with an average length of 48 feet. The majority of stored boats were powerboats.
- Located at 500 S. 16th St., Manitowoc

"The concept of reducing our dependence on foreign oil ... you would think everybody would be jumping on the bandwagon to be with us, but that's not the case," Tracy said.

•920-686-1997

•www.boatworx.com and www.guardianwireless.com

They've reduced the start-up capital needed from \$2.7 million to \$350,000, but have not found anyone in the local banking community ready to take the gamble, Tracy said, even though "our financials look pretty good."

The Kaderabeks will keep using biodiesel in their own vehicles and the 60-foot Italian yacht moored on the Manitowoc River — Elouise — they use to cruise Lake Michigan.

Boatworx, their main business, continues to thrive in its 10th year on the peninsula property. This past winter it provided heated, dry storage to 80 boats, with an average length of 48 feet.

The majority are powerboats, including an 85-footer, Intrinsic, owned by John Kuber of Germantown. On Wednesday, it was about ready to be launched into the Manitowoc River for the 2006 sailing season.

Kuber said he appreciates the off-season repair and maintenance capabilities of the Kaderabeks and their employees — Dave Janus, Corbin Schad, Dawn Philippi, Soulee Xiong and Matthew Puls.

Boatworx staff can do everything from oil changes to engine rebuilds to cosmetic repairs to "repowers" for owners who want to convert from gas to diesel engines.

"You name it, if it deals with a boat I do it ... fiberglass, custom woodworking, engine repair," said Schad, a six-year employee.

"I come into work every day and don't know what I'll be doing, whether it's welding or gelcoat work. I like the diversity," said Schad, an Elkhart Lake resident who owns 16- and 23-foot powerboats.

The smaller boat is a "Chevy," part of a 1957 promotional deal where new car owners also got a free boat.

Tracy Kaderabek said Schad and everyone else, including the owners, do a little bit of everything. She has her captain's license, awarded by the U.S. Merchant Marine.

"If you call and tell me your boat (up to 50 gross tons) is in Milwaukee and you don't have time to bring it up to our storage facility, I can go tender the boat back to Manitowoc," she said.

'Peace of mind ... priceless'

Until the Kaderabeks can manufacture biodiesel in large quantities, Boatworx and Guardian Wireless will be the major slices of their revenue pie.

The latter company was created in 2001, utilizing Dan Kaderabek's electrical and mechanical engineering expertise, after a memorable conversation Tracy had with a boat owner.

"I can remember him standing on the deck and saying, 'Now I can relax because the boat is out of the water. I don't have to worry about it anymore,'" she said.

Boat owners can fret over everything from their vessel sinking, getting broken into, having power disrupted, or a fire damaging their pride and joy.

The Kaderabeks, who live in Cleveland, formed Guardian Wireless, with wireless security systems capable of monitoring various functions associated with boats and RVs.

For example, with Marine Guardian, sensors monitor for illegal entry, smoke, low battery voltage, or water level.

Using Kaderabek's own cellular network and computer server, if something is going wrong, the system contacts the owner via e-mail and automated recording to three phone numbers.

Dan Kaderabek said the voice might say, "This is your guardian system. You have a high water alarm."

The owner acknowledges the recording, and then might phone marina management, a friend who is on his or her nearby boat, or, in the case of an intrusion, the police.

Over the last five years, the Kaderabeks have added to the Guardian Wireless lineup to include sensors, which can be placed on tool chests at construction sites. It is not uncommon for the tools to be worth up to \$100,000.

Via an Internet site, owners can change sensor functions and phone numbers to be called in case of an alert.

"Peace of mind ... priceless" is the slogan for the Guardian Wireless products.

Tracy Kaderabek recently won \$3,000 in a business plan competition sponsored by the Northeast Wisconsin Chapter of the Wisconsin Innovation Network and the Northeast Wisconsin Regional Economic Development Partnership.

Her goals in 2006 are to more effectively market and promote the Guardian Wireless products, secure patents for the circuit boards developed for the units, and form alliances with major RV and boat manufacturers to add the products as accessories or customer options.