

The Herald-Mail ONLINE
<http://www.herald-mail.com/>



05/09/2008

BIG IDEA nets \$25,000 for Chambersburg couple

Hauks manufacture snorkel equipment for Jeep Wranglers

By **DON AINES**
chambersburg@herald-mail.com

CHAMBERSBURG, Pa. - Laid off from his flooring job during a slow period last year, Kenny Hawk began making some extra money through his off-roading hobby - manufacturing snorkel equipment for Jeep Wranglers.

Kenny and Shanna Hawk of Chambersburg, Pa., who started River Raider Snorkel Systems last year, won the inaugural Ben Franklin Venture Investment Forum \$25,000 BIG IDEA Business Plan Contest. **(Credit: Don Aines / Bureau reporter)**

On Thursday, River Raider Snorkel Systems earned Hawk and his wife, Shanna, \$25,000 from the Ben Franklin Venture Investment Forum, money that the Chambersburg couple plans to invest in welding and fabricating equipment for the burgeoning business.

The money will come in handy for the manufacturing facility they to build near New Franklin, Pa.

"The idea is really nothing new. It's been around since World War II," Ken Hawk said after the check presentation. Early Jeeps often were fitted with a snorkel, a tube for the air intake system allowing the vehicle to cross shallow streams, he said.

"Our intent was not to sell it," but other off-roaders would see the equipment and want a snorkel of their own, Hawk said.

River Raider qualified for the first biennial \$25,000 BIG IDEA Business Plan Contest, which required that contestants not have had substantial sales prior to July 2007, said Jill Edwards, executive director of the Ben Franklin Venture Investment Forum.

River Raider was judged the best of six finalists that submitted businesses plans to the Small Business Development Center of Shippensburg (Pa.) University. Applicants were from Franklin, Adams, York and Cumberland counties, said Cheryl Young, a consultant to the center.

The Ben Franklin Venture Investment Forum is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting entrepreneurialism in Pennsylvania, according to the forum's Web site at www.venture-forum.org. The forum sponsored six other regional \$25,000 contests throughout the state.

Hawk designs, makes, sells and, when asked, installs the equipment, while Shanna shoulders the administrative tasks that keep a business in business.

"Building and design, that's what he likes to do," said Shanna, whose husband was home-schooled until his final years of high school, when he attended the Franklin County Career and Technology Center.

America perhaps is the global leader when it comes to driving vehicles over rough terrain and into deep water for amusement, but River Raider also has received orders from Canada, Europe and Australia, Hawk said.

Hawk's early snorkels were made of steel tubing, but now are cast aluminum, allowing them to be produced faster and at a lower cost. River Raider works with several component suppliers in the county, he said.

The company operates out of a one-car garage, but the couple has acquired land for a 40-foot-by-90-foot building to manufacture River Raider's line of products, which now includes hood vents, front and rear bumpers, tire mounts, rock sliders and rocker guards. Snorkels are made for Jeeps from as far back as the 1970s, and Hauk said the company soon will begin making the devices for other makes and models.

Hauk also is working on a belt-driven compressor to fit in the engine compartment to power pneumatic tools or pump up a flat.

Hauk said the Small Business Development Center was instrumental in getting the business off on the right foot, reviewing their business plan and offering direction along the way.

"We realized as we began to grow that we needed professional guidance," he said.

Edwards said the prize for the four-county region will be awarded again in 2010, but a \$100,000 prize will be awarded next year by the forum in a competition that encompasses 32 counties.

Young said some other finalists included the maker of an electronic student identification card with a built-in emergency notification system; a manufacturer of plastic snow for use on ski slopes in the summer; and a company producing an alternative fuel for wood stoves.

Reader Comments:

Please note: The Herald-Mail does not review every comment posted by our visitors, and we are not responsible for the content of the messages. The postings are the sole responsibility of the poster. We reserve the right to review, edit and/or delete any message for any reason, including but not limited to postings that are commercial in nature, contain profanity, off-topic or offensive. We reserve the right to revoke the posting privileges of any person who violates these rules at any time.

There are currently no reader comments associated with this story.

Copyright The Herald-Mail ONLINE