

Two Martin County companies on Top 50 list to watch

By Paul Ivice

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STUART — Two Martin County companies on the verge of huge growth spurts have been named to a list of the Top 50 Florida Companies to Watch.

Advanced Technologies Group Inc. and H2Ocean were nominated by the Business Development Board of Martin County and selected by the Michigan-based Edward Lowe Foundation, which started the Companies to Watch program eight years ago and now operates it in five states. This is the second year for Florida's program.

Edward Lowe was an entrepreneur who began selling clay to replace sand as cat box litter in 1947 and by the time of his death in 1995 had turned Tidy Cat into a business worth \$500 million.

Companies to Watch looks for second-stage companies that are quietly creating jobs, developing innovation and contributing to their communities, said foundation spokeswoman Melissa Phillips.

Business Development Board Executive Director Timothy Dougher said, "Second stage companies are those businesses that are well beyond startups and grow past \$1 million in total receipts and up to \$50 million. This entrepreneurial mindset leads to innovation, expansion and job creation."

ATGI is an aerospace research and development firm founded in 1995 by former Pratt & Whitney engineer John Justak, now the Stuart-based company's president.

Because of recent success with development of the world's most powerful Ram Air Turbine, which the U.S. Navy is testing for use in its next-generation electronic warfare aircraft, and other products, ATGI's revenues and staff have doubled over the past two years, Justak said.

ATGI's air turbine, whose 110 kilowatt output far exceeds the Navy's 60-kilowatt specifications, is being tested for use to power radar and communications jamming equipment in the next-generation EA-18G Growler, a Boeing-built carrier-based electronic warfare aircraft that is a specialized version of the F/A-18F Super Hornet.

ATGI recently received a \$3 million award from the Navy to upgrade and test the prototype Ram Air Turbine.

ATGI also has developed and manufactures turbo machinery with commercial applications "that we've been working on for 10 years and are finally getting into customers' hands," Justak said.

He said he projects another doubling of AGTI's staff to 24 employees in the next year, by which time the company could see a fourfold increase in revenues.

H2Ocean, which relocated its headquarters to Martin County in 2008, is in the midst of a breakthrough for sales of its all-natural remedies containing sea salt since its products began appearing on Walgreens store shelves in June.

For about 10 years now, H2Ocean has been selling its array of products through about 5,000 independent outlets such as physician, dentist and veterinary offices, tattoo parlors and piercing studios.

H2Ocean products now are in 25 Walgreens from Vero Beach to Miami, said Scott Stier, H2Ocean's executive director of operations.

Stier said the company has added three more employees to its staff of 30 since the Walgreens launch.

With about 8,300 stores, Walgreens is the nation's largest drug retailing chain.

H2Ocean Vice President Marty Stern said recognition from the Edward Lowe Foundation is important.

"Anytime you get an award or achievement for your company based on its growth or success, especially at the statewide level, it's a little marker we can take to the higher-ups at Walgreens and other mass merchandisers to help us continue to expand," Stern said.





Top 50 Florida Companies to Watch

H2Ocean, Inc. and ATGI

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