

April 2022

# RV PRO

RV-PRO.COM

## Fired Up!

*Ember RV finds success focusing on lightweight trailers with independent suspensions and solar panels that make them off-road and off-grid capable.*

### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- RV Retailer is on the Move
- Dealer Merger Mania Continues
- Way Interglobal Offers Way More

**PLUS: SPECIAL MARINE SECTION**

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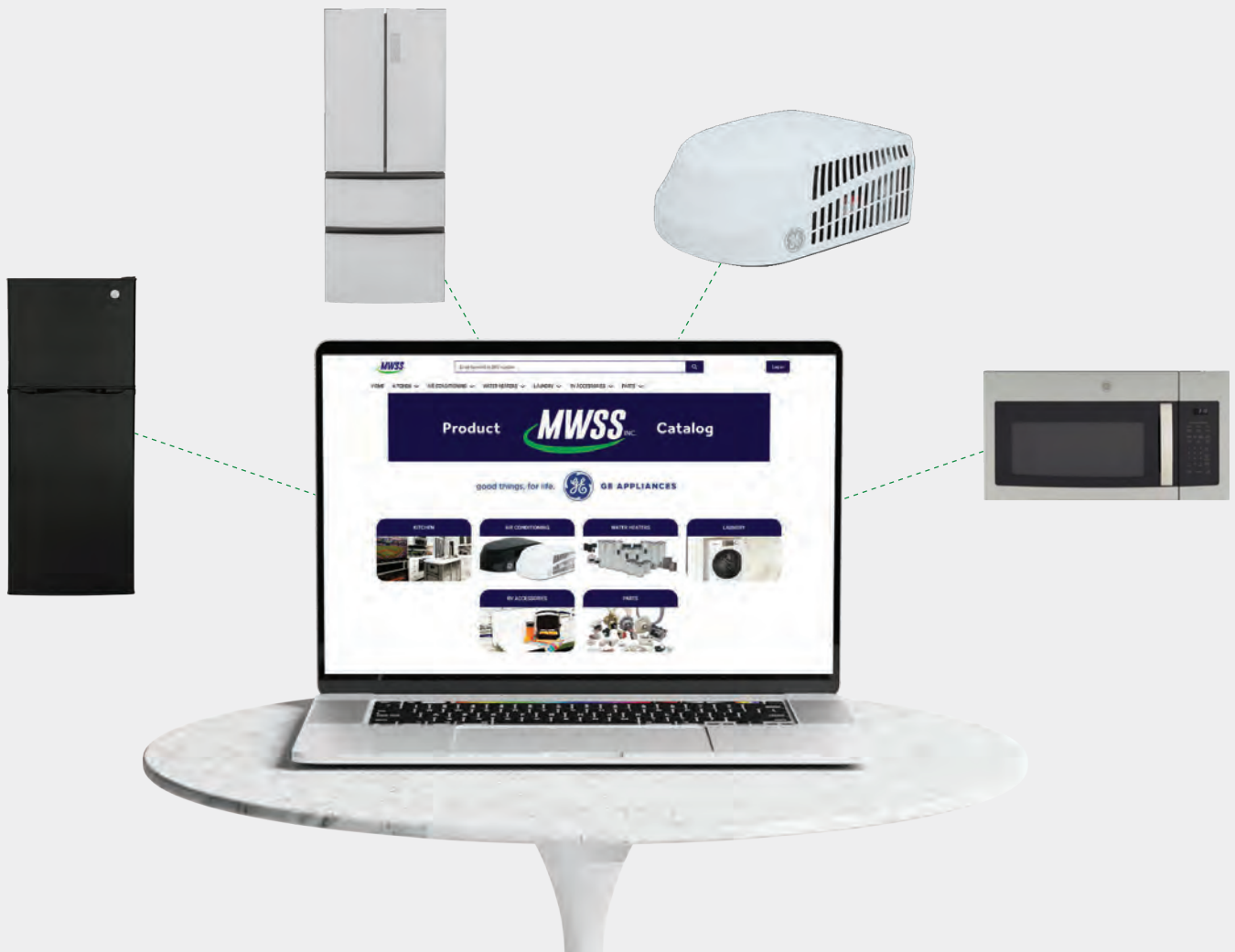


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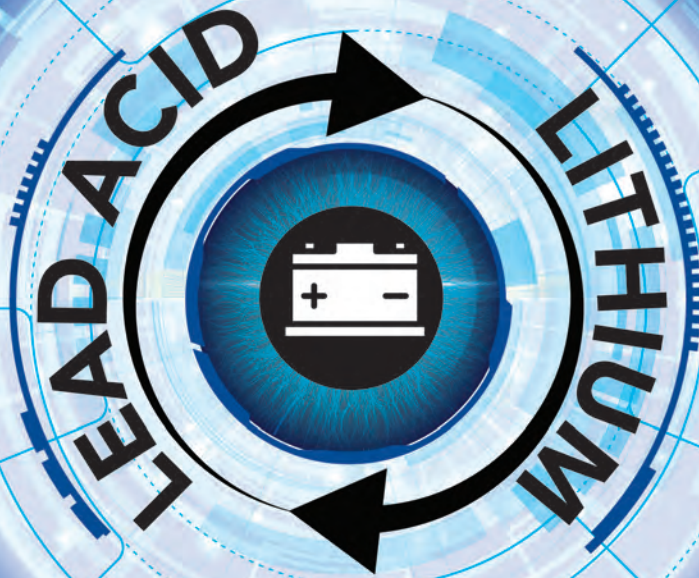
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Ember RV's Chris Barth and Ashley Lehman are pictured next to some of the company's lightweight travel trailers on Ember's production floor in Bristol, Ind. The RV maker's unique trailers are catching on with dealers and consumers. (Photo by Steve Toepp/ Midwest Photographics)

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## No Need to Panic



**Bradley  
Worrell**

EDITOR  
brad@nbm.com

When I was on the phone with dealers and other industry professionals recently, the mood was noticeably somber.

The reason was completely understandable: the Russians invasion of Ukraine a few weeks earlier had caught everyone by surprise, creating huge volatility in the market. On top of that, the realization that the Federal Reserve was going to raise interest rates to combat inflation had some feeling that the RV market is heading toward a bruising year.

I get that. I really do.

Still, I've been a part of this industry now for almost 20 years, which has been long enough to see it go through a global pandemic, a recession that marked the biggest economic correction since the Great Depression, a huge upheaval in the makeup of the industry resulting from rapid industry consolidation and too many other

notable changes to list here. The result of those cumulative experiences have convinced me that this industry is populated by tough, determined individuals who can take whatever outside forces throw at them and come out stronger for it.

I don't say that to minimize current concerns. Even before the war in Ukraine, there were worries about inflation, about the ability to get needed parts for RVs and automobiles, and about challenges recruiting and retaining qualified employees, to name just a few. Undoubtedly many more challenges will present themselves in the months ahead.

Given these uncertain times, it's unclear whether the industry will be able to repeat the stellar performance it had in 2021, when manufacturers shipped 600,000-plus RVs to dealers. Still, as a dealer friend remarked to me earlier this year, even if the industry *only* ships 450,000 RVs in 2022, that would still be a really, really good year by historic standards.

Could the shipments number go lower? Of course it could, but ultimately, it doesn't change my positive outlook for the industry's prospects.

### An Industry of Doers

A big part of the reason I'm optimistic on the industry's staying power is because I know from personal experience that it's populated by people with a "can-do attitude" who have gone on to do remarkable things. Those are the stories we love sharing in the pages of *RV PRO*.

We have several examples of that in this month's issue. In particular, I invite you to read the story about Ember RV, which is making a name for itself with lightweight towables that are off-road and off-grid capable; about Way Interglobal, which is making major inroads with OEMs and the larger industry with its growing line of home-style kitchen appliances; and our Q&A interview with Jon Ferrando, founder, CEO and president of RV Retailer, which has grown into one the largest RV dealer groups in just four short years.

Meanwhile, the *RV PRO* team is hard at work on future magazine issues, preparing stories about other doers who make this a great industry in which to work. So, stay tuned.

As always, thanks for reading.

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# Ember RV is Fired Up



By Mike Harbour

*The startup RV maker is finding success with lightweight models, with features including an independent suspension and a standard solar package, that make them off-road and off-grid capable.*

Conventional wisdom might suggest the worst time to start building travel trailers is in the middle of a global pandemic, so it's probably safe to say Ember RV is anything but conventional.

For one thing, the company – created by a quartet of former Jayco executives in late 2020 – jumped immediately into a category that's still finding its footing: Off-road lightweight towables. For another, Ember's Overland and Overland Micro Series travel trailers aren't stick-and-tin units, but instead are composed of steel and composite laminates.

Those trailers even ride on independent suspensions – a feature unheard of under typical towables. Clearly, the target market is a bit more affluent than buyers of lower-priced, entry-level models.

Yet, defying convention was definitely intentional, according to co-founder Ashley (Bontrager) Lehman, Ember's president and CEO, who says the idea was reflected even in the company's formation.

"We got started in December 2020, really with this idea that we saw a way that we could do things a little different and a little

better – not only with the products that we're offering, but with how we're going to build up our company," she says of fellow founders Chris Barth, Steve Delagrange and Ernie Miller. "We were eager to build a better company and provide a fun and welcoming atmosphere for our team members to come to work in every day."

## Idea Started with Securing the Right Employees

Barth, Ember's vice president and COO, says having the right people was key to achieving that goal.

"Ernie and Steve are two of the most popular operations leaders, really, that I've ever worked with," he says. "When we talked to Ashley about building up Ember, we wanted to have operations folks who are involved in leadership decisions and the direction of the company. Our purpose, then, and our focus became making sure that we could create a culture where people felt like they had a better amount of buy-in and the idea of being a real team and doing things together which isn't always present in every working environment."







**Ember RV President and CEO Ashley (Bontrager) Lehman is pictured overlooking the manufacturer's production floor. After years of working for Jayco, the company founded by her grandparents, Lehman is excited to be heading her own RV manufacturing business.**

As COVID-19 radically changed how people worked, Barth says he wanted to ensure Ember's staff walked into a building that felt like home and was filled with family.

"Having Steve and Ernie involved has flavored the product and the corporate culture and made us all get into it a different way than had it just been Ashley and I," Barth says. "In some cases, you see a big group of investors or salespeople who are involved in starting up an RV company but maybe it's missing some of the other key elements."

It might seem unconventional that Delagrange and Miller, who collectively have almost 50 years of Jayco experience under their belts, share the title of director of operations, but Barth says it makes perfect sense.

"We made a conscious decision to not have a giant amount of vice presidents throughout the company. Both of them were at equal footing where they came from in their last roles. Title isn't very important at our company. We decided that they would both be at the same level," he says.

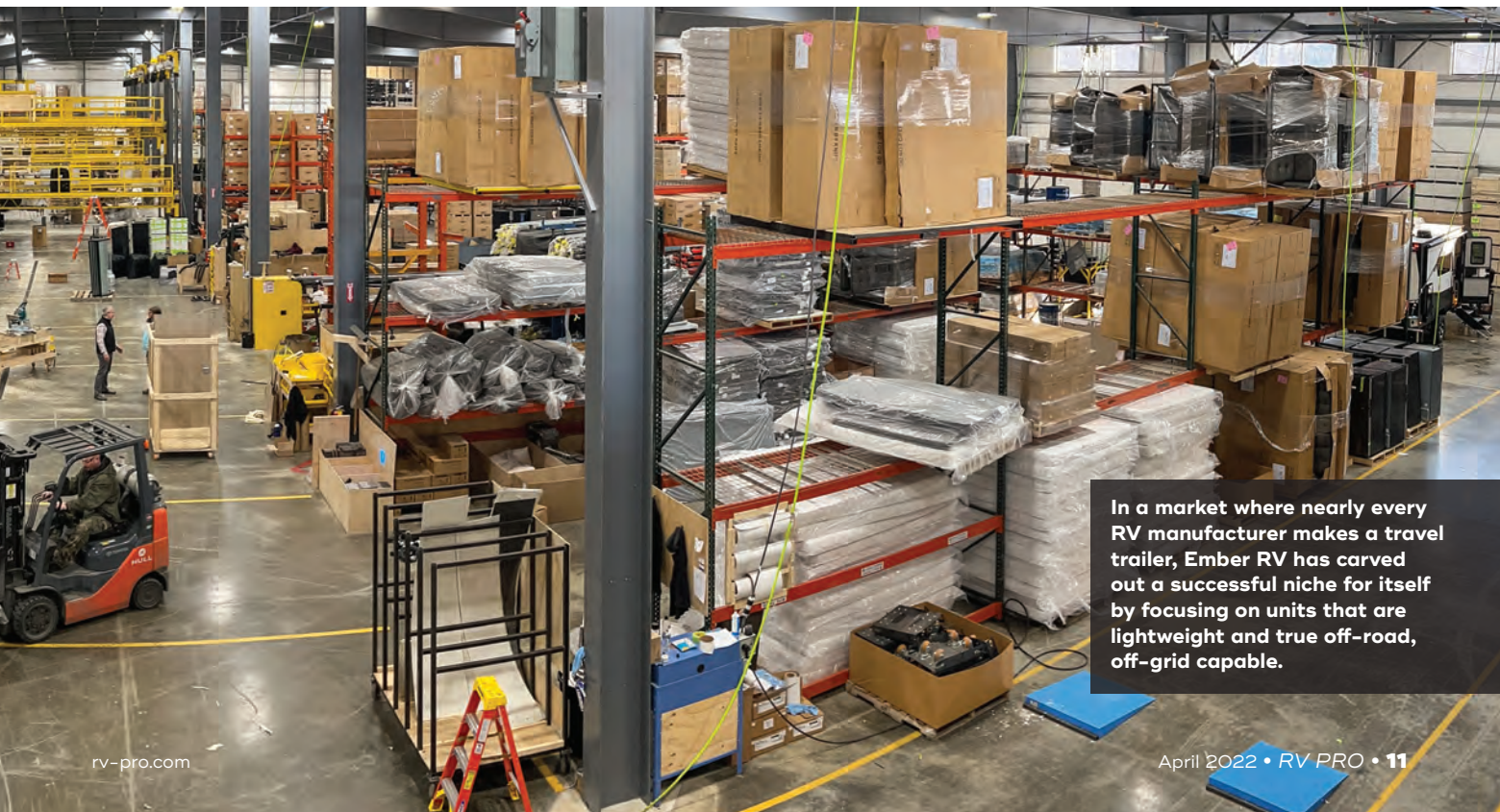
Barth, who was led sales and product development for Forest River before moving to Jayco, says the two men's strengths don't overlap at all.

"Each of them has their specialties," according to Barth. "Ernie has been very involved in our lamination facility setup, so he's leading that project. Ernie gets involved, for instance, in some other items like a cabinet shop setup that he's really excited about.

"Steve tends to be somebody who really dives in strong with personal development of our group leader team, our PDI team," Barth adds. "They've shown us that they can specialize, as well as complement each other, which is why they are such a great team."

Meanwhile, one of many tasks confronting Lehman – the granddaughter of Jayco founders Lloyd and Bertha Bontrager and herself a Jayco veteran – during Ember's early days was securing a location where the company's "adventure campers" would be built.

"I happened to find a spec building that was going up in our area, which is very rare – especially with the situation this county is facing right now," she says of Ember's home in Bristol, Ind. "I



**In a market where nearly every RV manufacturer makes a travel trailer, Ember RV has carved out a successful niche for itself by focusing on units that are lightweight and true off-road, off-grid capable.**





Ember RV's manufacturing floor is buzzing with activity these days, as demand grows for the company's Overland Series and Overland Micro Series lightweight travel trailers.

*"Anybody who would buy one of our coaches for off-roading absolutely could use it for everything else you're ever going to use for camping. Just like if a consumer bought a very high-end tent, they could still throw it in their backyard and use it with the kids."*

**– Chris Barth, Ember vice president and COO**



Ember team members Mike Sam Miguel (left) and Anthony Bud Yoder install the CURT Independent Suspension system onto a trailer. Ember says CURT's suspension system gives its trailers the ability to go off-road where other adventure trailers would fear to tread.

got in at the right time with the builder and we were able to make a few changes to make it more conducive to building RVs. Just on the other end of the same street as that 88,000-square-foot building was another, smaller building with about 18,000 square feet with some office space attached to it that became available."

The latter became Ember's corporate office, while the former houses the main manufacturing facility. The stage was set for the production of a most unlikely travel trailer to come out of Elkhart County in some time.

### **Eyeing an Opportunity with Adventure Campers**

"One of our goals when we started this was to identify an area that we could get into that is not so crowded that we'd get lost in the shuffle. Ashley and I are both very interested in making sure we were doing things that were going to hit the customers directly and excite them and the dealers equally, and we looked at the adventure camper space," Barth says. "We knew we wanted to do lightweight laminates. That's still a growing area of the marketplace."

"We wanted to do something that was going to be exciting as well. The overland space was something I had been watching for years grow and get into the mainstream. I knew that off-road trailers that people were talking about in those spaces were not really available in the North American marketplace," he adds.

While there were similar RVs coming from small, custom builders in the U.S., plus some Australian imports, Bontrager and Barth say they believed Ember could step into the niche with a unique product that not only handled travels off-the-beaten path (and pavement) but also be equally suitable for typical camping excursions.

"Anybody who would buy one of our coaches for off-roading absolutely could use it for everything else you're ever going to use for camping. Just like if a consumer bought a very high-end tent, they could still throw it in their backyard and use it with the kids," Barth says.

Research indicated buyers of the Australian-built trailers complained about the amount of import parts used, Barth recalls. What's more, he says he and Lehman believed those units weren't built as well as they had once been.

Ember trailers, by contrast, addressed both those concerns head-on, according to Barth.

"Ashley and I really did seek out domestic materials and domestic build," he says. "What if we build something that's lightweight and also domestically sourced and we do some composite materials? That led us into the composites discussion, because that's not coming from overseas. The supply chain woes and some of the problems that we saw kind of flavored the direction we headed in as we did our product development."

Ember even reconsidered conventional demographics that group customers by age, according to Bontrager and Barth.

"We have seen, just at shows this year, the age-group thing is completely out the window. It has to do with the kind of camping profile that the person meets up with. RVIA put out a huge study that Ashley and I pored over early last year with about 120 pages,



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**Ember Group Leader Verlin Hershberger installs a solar power panel on trailer. Solar power comes standard on Ember RVs, giving them the ability to go off-grid if its trailer owners desire.**



**Ember team member Luis Lopez installs a range hood in a trailer. While the exteriors of Ember trailers are built for durability, the insides of the trailers feature many of the comforts of home.**

where they identified seven different unique camping styles of different customers and some of them cross over into each other. We targeted a number of the camping styles,” Barth says. “Some people who want to get off-road and off-grid, for sure, but also some people who want something that’s better built. Some people who want something that’s smaller or lighter – and there’s a lot of crossover there.”

### **Specializing in Lightweight, Rugged Trailers**

At the top of Ember’s lines is the Overland Series. Ranging in length from 17 feet to 19 feet, the five models offer dry weights of less than 5,000 pounds, with three-piece bathrooms, plenty of sleeping options, and an angular profile that stands out among other travel trailers. There’s even a pair that each come with a slide for the living area.

The Overland Micro Series – Ember’s take on teardrop trailers – come in two models. One model, named ROK, is equipped with a rear outdoor kitchen, while ROL is a rear outdoor locker model. Both hover at the 2,000-pound dry weight mark and measure just under 13 feet in length.

Ember says all of its units are off-road and off-grid capable.

What may not be unique are the floorplans, but Barth says that, too, is on purpose.

“The floorplans we focused on are bestsellers in lightweight or smaller trailers throughout the industry. So, in some cases, when I put together the floorplans for Ashley and I to review with the team, there were up to 20 different manufacturers building the same basic concept,” he says. “These are coaches that already are

very popular in the consumer space, so we just had to do our take on them – and what we found is there’s always the ability to modify, to adapt, to make them a little bit better.”

To that end, both lines – which boast no wood construction save for the cabinetry and furniture – have a standout feature that should prove popular.

“Obviously the CURT Independent Suspension was a huge deal. That is a dual-shock, heavy-duty, coil-spring trailing arm suspension,” Barth says. “That was a really exciting thing that we co-developed with Lippert.

“There’s a gentleman over at Lippert named John Rhymer, who is their vice president of innovation. I met with John early last year about my concepts of what I really was excited about. John is an avid RVer and off-roader, so that all made sense to him perfectly,” Barth adds. “His team put together a fantastic independent suspension built here in North America versus what was commercially available, which would’ve all been imported. That was really cool to get that part going, but that independent suspension required a heavy-duty chassis with tube steel for strength.”

Barth says Ember’s Trailblazer Chassis is the only way to go for a travel trailer designed for serious off-pavement usage.

“That thing is completely overbuilt but from an engineering standpoint,” he says. “That’s got a lot of steel underneath it and it’s probably way more robust than it needs to be, but we also know people are going to use these in a different way than a traditional RV.”

There’s also a heavy-duty aluminum exoskeleton of sorts that holds the Azdel laminate sidewall and roof panels together.





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**Ember Group Leader Stephen Grabill performs checks on one of the distinctive, durable metal gear boxes found on the front of all Ember trailers.**



**Chris Barth, Ember's vice president and COO, and Lehman are pictured on the manufacturing floor. The company has come a long way since launching in late 2020.**



**Ember RV's production facility and headquarters are located in Bristol, Ind. Lehman says Ember was very fortunate that the manufacturing building became available just as the company was looking for a home.**

Middlebury, Ind.-based L&W Engineering built that structure, as well as the Gear Box storage feature atop the hitch's A-frame.

Meanwhile, the floor is a special composite built by Ridge Corp. called TransCore; the lightweight material also is used by both Airstream and nuCamp.

### **Lehman's Influence Felt on Ember Interiors**

Lehman's influence dominates the interior, which she says she based on the organic modern style now popular in homes today.

"I really wanted to make it feel like home – a comfortable, welcoming space for the customer to enjoy at the end of their adventurous day," she says. "I didn't want too much of an influence of my own into the coach. I wanted it to be a clean palette that somebody could come in and add their pops of color and make it their own flair. We did put wood on the inside with our cabinetry and our furniture, again wanting to give it that homey feel."

That's in contrast to other off-road units made by competitors, according to Lehman, which she says often feature hard surfaces and metallic colors akin to their exteriors.

"I wanted to make sure that we still made it feel like home," she says. "Thinking through the space and how we can best use it on the inside, where drawers and cabinets go makes a difference and where we can find extra storage that makes taking along all the gear much easier. It is about the colors and the materials, but it's also about the design of the floorplan and finding ways to use the space efficiently."

Of all the interior features, Lehman is most proud of the Overland Series Murphy bed.

"A lot of times, I feel like Murphy beds just don't look great when they are put away. Either the mattress is hanging out or manufacturers try to hide it or disguise it with overly decorative things that just end up looking off to me," she says. "I told the team I want this to look super clean, to where you might not even know there's a bed behind there. I would say mission accomplished."

"There's been several times where I've been at shows that a customer might walk into the unit and say, 'Well this one doesn't even have a bed.' I think that is one thing that is really cool from my perspective that the team was able to accomplish," she adds. "It cleaned up the whole coach in my opinion when that Murphy bed is put away."

### **Ember Eyeing Expansion Opportunities**

Make no mistake, Ember has designs beyond its present lines. Barth says a tandem-axle version of the CURT independent suspension will host perhaps a 25- or 26-foot Overland Series model in a couple of different floorplans in the near future. Of course, the RV manufacturer will eventually offer more typical offerings, too, once its production facilities scale accordingly.

"We always want to build what we call 'conventional-plus'. We want to do something that's a little bit better than the conventional," Barth says. "The next thing we come out with will be absolutely more in the conventional lightweight laminate travel trailer space but will still be conventional-plus." **RVP**



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# Way More Products

Way Interglobal's growing line of home-style kitchen appliances are making major inroads in the RV market.

By K. Schipper

**W**ayne Kaylor is a serial entrepreneur. And, with a successful history that dates all the way back to the mid-1980s, it's not surprising that his current company, Way Interglobal (he prefers to refer to it as Way), broke ground last June on a new headquarters building that will double the company's current space.

Still, Kaylor is something of an outlier in his own family, whose involvement in the RV industry dates to the 1950s, when his father was manufacturing the original Wildcat. Today, he has brothers, their children and his own all working for the OEMs, but in the sales and management sides.

What drew him to distribution?

"I don't know. It was just interesting to be able to learn about the industry from the other side and develop products to take to market," he says.

Having built and sold two previous companies, he recognized that, for Way, the best approach would be through developing his own brands, particularly in appliances, where his Everchill 12-volt refrigerators have become a major player.

## An RV Perspective

If there's one thing all three of Kaylor's companies have in common – besides being distributors – is that they've served the RV industry. It's the lifestyle RVs afford that he particularly likes.

"You're able to spend time with your family – not sitting in front of a TV or playing video games," he says. "Traveling is great, and it gives a different opportunity for travel than just going to a hotel. It gets you outside and gets you with other people. And, let's face it, we've got a beautiful country, so we should go out and look at it."

Not that he's opposed to electronics. Kaylor's first company, Tristar Distributing, which he founded in 1986, was the largest company distributing electronics to RV and van conversion companies. After selling Tristar in 1998, he followed that up with National Supply, which sold building products and supplies to the RV and manufactured housing industries.

In both cases, he acknowledges the markets changed considerably while he was in them. Then, in 2009, he launched Way Interglobal with a Chicago-based partner not affiliated with the RV industry and a tagline: "Take Your Home on the Road."

**WAY** Take your home  
on the road

This wide-angle view provides a sense of how large Way's warehouse is. Still, the company is currently building an 800,000-square-foot facility that it says will be one of the largest buildings in Elkhart County.





**Members of Way's executive team are pictured in the company's kitchen showroom in Elkhart, Ind. Pictured from left to right, back row, are: Chris Greer, vice president of product development; Stuart Blackburn, vice president of finance; Tom Halbert, vice president of sales; and front row, left to right: Kelly Davis, director of finance; Wayne Kaylor, founder and CEO; and Mike Custer, vice president of finance.**



PHOTOS BY STEVE TOEPP/MIDWEST PHOTOGRAPHICS

"We started by supplying suppliers," Kaylor explains. "A lot of today's big name supply companies were customers of ours. However, we soon realized we needed to pivot and open up our own facilities for distribution and to do it ourselves."

He adds that his years in the industry afforded him an advantage that many of his competitors don't have. He'd been doing business in Asia for more than 30 years, and those relationships allowed Way to not just build products, but to build products specifically for the RV industry.

It also allowed Way to develop products under its own brand names.

"Because the RV market is a little bit different, we felt it made more sense to have our own proprietary brands and products," Kaylor says. "We develop everything from the ground up. That means engineering it before we even get a finished product. Most of our products are designed specifically to the RV industry for fit, size, look and features."

Way does still distribute a few other brands – he mentions LG appliances and RCA televisions as examples – but he compares Way to home products manufacturer SC Johnson.

"They own Pledge in many different brands," Kaylor says. "But you hear the brands, not SC Johnson. The Everchill brand for us includes refrigeration, coolers and air conditioners under one name. Anything that heats for us – including ranges, fireplaces





**Way Aftermarket Sales Manager Pat Hines stands next to one of the company's 24-inch, four-burner slide-in gas ranges with a range hood. Way offers a variety of home-style kitchen appliances for OEMs and the aftermarket, including refrigerators, ranges and microwaves.**

*"The OEM customer can come to us as a one-stop shop where they can get their refrigerator, their range, their microwave and their rangehood. We can supply all those components."*

**– Wayne Kaylor,  
Way Interglobal president**



**Way's warehouse is well-stocked with the company's Everchill refrigerators. Way was an early adopter of 12-volt technology for its refrigerators. Previously, RV refrigerator manufacturers tended to use gas-absorption technology to keep refrigerator contents cold.**

and microwaves – are all Greystone products. We're tying them all together, but you don't always hear 'Way.'"

Way's other brands include Elite power solutions and other RV essentials, Drive electronics and Haven furnishings.

### **Filling a Void**

Still, it's the company's kitchen appliances that garner the most sales. Especially with its Everchill refrigerators, Kaylor was one of the early adopter of 12-volt technology. He says there are several reasons for that.

"There'd been a real void in refrigeration for years," he observes. "For 20, 30, even 40 years, everybody had used gas-absorption, which isn't the most efficient way of cooling, and it gave campers a small capacity. It has its place, but we decided to invent a new product that would be in the 12-volt landscape."

Of course, the 12-volt units also build on an increased interest in the growing use of solar panels and the development of better batteries for RVs, as well as the popularity of boondocking. Still, it wasn't an easy product to develop.

"It took us two or three years before we actually came to market with a 12-volt unit," Kaylor says. "The first year was bumpy, to say the least, getting people to understand that it actually worked as advertised. Now, the whole industry is going in that direction."

Nor has it hurt that Everchill's 17-cubic-foot model does an excellent job of replicating a 110-volt residential refrigerator in a 12-volt unit with French doors and a full freezer.

How popular is that particular unit?

Kaylor says demand has grown steadily since the company introduced this model and Way is ramping up production and working on speeding up delivery.

Still, interest in bringing 110-volt home refrigerators into some RV units remains.

"Certainly the 110-volt residential refrigerator has its place with some RV owners," Kaylor says. "But now that we've developed larger 12-volt units for the larger RVs, there's less interest. Our units are made specifically for the RV market, they're developed to withstand heat and cold and bouncing around and all the different environmental situations you don't have in a home. The 110-volt units will work fine, but we're built for the rigors of our industry."

A more immediate challenge: For some RV buyers, a 17-cubic-foot refrigerator still isn't big enough.

"We're in development of a 20-cubic unit," Kaylor says. "Again, we're designing on a dedicated 12-volt platform, and we're continuously engineering the products to make sure the compressors are large enough to provide the same rapid cooling our other 12-volt products deliver and to operate them efficiently in the larger size. At that point, we're getting into the larger size of residential refrigerators."






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A stylized graphic of a road with dashed lines, curving from the bottom right towards the center of the page. The road is white with teal dashed lines, set against a solid teal background.





**Kaylor, in the center, is pictured with Way team members (from left to right): Nate Gotshall, supply chain lead; Kayla Ault, customer service manager; Nick Hamm, supply chain analyst; and Scott Vosburgh, supply chain analyst.**

Despite the challenges, Kaylor adds that Way expects to have a 20-cubic-foot unit on the market later this year.

### Bringing the Heat

Everchill refrigerators and cooling devices may be Way's most-popular products, but Kaylor says the company's Greystone ranges and cooking devices are also much in demand.

"We've done a really good job of tying our kitchen package together," he says. "The OEM customer can come to us as a one-stop shop where they can get their refrigerator, their range, their microwave and their range hood. We can supply all those components."

Particularly popular is the company's 24-inch, four-burner slide-in gas range. However, Kaylor believes that's about as big as a range will go, and it will continue to run on propane. A reason for the size limitation is the compactness of the average RV kitchen.

"Your home range is 30 inches – and given the size constraints of an RV kitchen – I don't think we'll ever get there," he says. "However, I'm confident the 24-inch will continue to grow in popularity because you can obviously cook a lot more in it and it really gives that residential look."

And, he adds, it would take a tremendous amount of power to make an electric stove practical.

"The power consumption to run an electric cooktop or range is so much that it would be difficult to do unless you had a significant amount of battery power," Kaylor says. "Probably more than many RVs could sustain, to be honest."

Still, he adds that Way has developed an all-electric unit – a two-burner cooktop without a full oven – for some OEMs, and will continue to explore developing efficient, high performance electric cooking appliances. Another cooking innovation from Greystone is a cooktop where, rather than a traditional oven underneath, it has a microwave/convection oven.

"It frees up cabinet space above the cooktop," Kaylor says. "We've gotten feedback from many consumers who don't like to have to reach above their heads to take hot food out of a microwave."

As for other "at-home" appliances in the offing, Kaylor notes that washers and dryers are already an add-on for some units, although at the dealer level. Dishwashers are another story.

"Dishwashers, in general, have been for high-end coaches: Class A motorhomes and luxury vehicles," he says. "We've seen more requests for an 18-inch dishwasher, and we do have one in development currently."

He adds that he's not sure what the take on that will be given that space in an RV kitchen is already at a premium. In the future, it may become part of a Way package, though.

Because the company offers its own brands, research and development has always been a key component of Way's operation, and Kaylor says the company has really expanded its product development and engineering teams in the past two-and-a-half years.

"We see that as the continued driver of our growth going forward," he says. "We have teams both here and in China – electrical engineers and product development teams. And one or the other will come up with a concept or an idea, we'll vet it for the market with our sales team and then literally start from a blank piece of paper and work back."

The other contributor to many of Way's ideas is the OEMs themselves. Kaylor and his team developed the idea of bringing in brand managers in that slow period between Thanksgiving and Christmas to introduce its new offerings.

"A lot of promising ideas come out of those meetings," he says. "An OEM will tell us, 'Hey, we could use a bigger refrigerator,' or 'If you could add this feature, it would benefit both our dealers and retail customers.' It's a lot of learning and listening and then getting our product development team to implement them."



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In this file photo from early 2021, Kaylor is pictured with one of the company's 17-cubic-foot Everchill refrigerators with French doors. Kaylor touted that refrigerator as being the largest of its kind on the market at the time. Way is currently developing a 20-cubic-foot refrigerator it expects to bring to the market later this year.

*"There'd been a real void in refrigeration for years. ... Everybody had used gas-absorption, which isn't the most efficient way of cooling, and it gave campers a small capacity. It has its place, but we decided to invent a new product that would be in the 12-volt landscape."*

– Wayne Kaylor, Way Interglobal president



Way has a large facility in Elkhart that includes its offices and showroom, as well as a substantial warehouse facility. Being located in Elkhart means Way is near many of its OEM partners.

## Read More About Way:

<http://rvpro.link/bvr5r>

<http://rvpro.link/yef2q>

And, yes, sometimes that means developing a whole new product.

"If somebody comes to us with a concept that they want to take advantage of for a period of time, we're definitely interested in working with them to develop that," Kaylor says. "Eventually, it's going to be good for the whole industry, and hopefully it's good for that OEM as well."

## Eyeing the Aftermarket

It's an approach that, so far, has paid big dividends for Kaylor. So big that the company is in the midst of building a new global headquarters that will double its existing footprint, currently spread across four different facilities in Elkhart, and will allow Way to grow its employment base by a third.

Groundbreaking on the 800,000-square-foot building took place last June and construction is expected to be completed late this year.

"It's going to allow a lot more efficiencies for us as a company," Kaylor says. "It's also going to allow us to get into other products that the market has asked us to get into. We just don't have the space today, so this is exciting. We'll have a bigger showroom, and biggest testing lab and much more warehousing capabilities, plus the efficiencies of operating under one roof."

One area that Kaylor is particularly anxious to grow is Way's involvement in the aftermarket. Since late October, the company has added both a new director of aftermarket sales and an aftermarket coordinator. Kaylor admits that, until now, the distributor has done little with the aftermarket.

"We do a fair amount on our website, but we've been really focused on our core OEM business, so that aftermarket was not at the top of our list," he says. "Now, we've got many products in the market, and people either need to refurb it or upgrade from whatever else they have in their units today. This will allow us to work with the STAG's and the Camping Worlds to help them get our products to retail customers."

That's not to say the company has totally ignored the aftermarket, because it does have a network of RV dealerships around the country – as well as mobile technicians – to service Way's products if there are problems.

"We do have a service network set up, and we have tried to make things very easy," he says. "For instance, with our refrigerators, there are very few parts that would ever need to be serviced, and they're all plug-and-play. It doesn't get a lot easier than that."

Regardless of the market segment – but particularly with his OEM customers – Kaylor says the most-important thing to know about Way is that it's willing to listen and learn.

"We want to be good partners to the industry, which I think we are," he says. "Our whole team supports the industry and believes in it. That's kind of a mission statement within our organization. We're designing and building product that people need. When we talk about 'Take Your Home on the Road,' that's what the market is requesting from the OEMs, and we want to help their customers do exactly that." **RVF**



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# RV Retailer is on the Move

By Bradley Worrell

Company founder, CEO and President Jon Ferrando reflects on the fast-growing dealership group's successes in 2021 while offering insights on its plans moving forward.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RV RETAILER

**Jon Ferrando is the founder, president and CEO of rapidly growing RV dealership group RV Retailer, which last year acquired 52 stores in 52 weeks. The dealership group now includes 94 stores in 29 states.**

*"We had bold goals coming in. We were very excited about entering the industry and we had high expectations – but we've exceeded them all. It's been exhilarating."*

**F**our years ago, RV Retailer was just an idea.

Today, it's the second-largest dealership group in the country, with 94 stores (currently), more than 800 service bays and in excess of 3,500 associates in 29 states – and the Fort Lauderdale, Fla.-based company still has plenty of opportunities to grow, according to company founder, President and CEO Jon Ferrando.

"We're focused on driving our business," he says. "We have tremendous organic growth within our store footprint that we're focused on driving, and we do have greenfields (new store builds) and acquisitions."

Does that mean RV Retailer might be able to overtake Camping World, currently the largest dealership with about 185 stores, sometime in the near future?

"As far as whether and at what point we might become the largest (dealer), I'm more focused on the business today," Ferrando says. "We're thinking about building out an incredible customer experience and an incredible culture and continuing to grow where that makes sense."

In an extensive interview with *RV PRO*, Ferrando shared many details about the company's plans moving forward, including its goal of selling more than 60,000 RVs this year, which would exceed the impressive 40,000-plus units he says the dealership group retailed last year. He also shared why he believes RV Retailer has been so successful in such a short period time and offered insights into the company's plans moving forward. His answers have been condensed for space and lightly edited for style.

**RV PRO: Starting RV Retailer four-plus years ago, did you expect the business to be where it is today?**

**Ferrando:** We had bold goals coming in. We were very excited about entering the industry and we had high expectations – but we've exceeded them all. It's been exhilarating.

The team that we've been able to assemble and the number of high-quality dealerships and people that have come onboard has been amazing. Our OEM and supplier relationships are fantastic.

So, across the board, we've hit on all cylinders and we've definitely exceeded our expectations. The growth that we've been able to drive in a high-quality way has been really amazing.





**RV PRO: Do you think it's possible for RV Retailer to repeat the success it had in 2021, particularly when it comes to acquisitions?**

**Ferrando:** Yeah, last year was exhilarating, exceptional and historic in terms of that level of growth. Having the opportunity to acquire 52 stores – and not only do that, but to do it extremely well – was amazing.

We're in it for the long term, so whether we are at that level again this year or not remains to be seen, but adding 20 stores this year would be a great year. That's a lot of growth.

We're focused on the quality – not necessarily the quantity – and we're also very patient. We talk to prospective sellers sometimes for two or three years and then they decide, 'I'd like to become a part of RVR.' There's a lot of great RV dealers out there that could call tomorrow and say, 'Hey Jon, I'm ready to go; we'd be excited to sell this year.'

Or, that call might come six months or two years from now. We're opportunistic and very focused on executing on our plan.

**RV PRO: RV Retailer now has a presence in 29 states. Are there still markets you would like to expand into?**

**Ferrando:** We still have some additional markets we're looking at. We also have a lot of opportunities in our existing markets to expand, whether it's Texas, Florida, the southeastern U.S. and the western U.S.

We really broke into new markets in a major way last year with our Blue Dog acquisition, among others. So, that really gives us a good footprint to also expand into other markets out there.

We're certainly not everywhere yet. And there's a lot of geographic expansion opportunities to serve our customers where they travel, where we're not already located.

**RV PRO: With acquisitions, is part of your goal to be able to offer nearly nationwide coverage to customers, wherever they might be traveling?**

**Ferrando:** There are a number of factors that go into our decisions on acquisitions, and that is certainly one of them. Being able to add a presence in markets where people love to enjoy their

Ferrando is pictured here addressing RV Retailer team members at the dealership group's third annual Leadership Summit, held at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium field in Atlanta.



RV Retailer's three day summit offered the opportunity for the dealership group's leadership team to spell out their vision for 2022 and the years ahead to team members attending from across the country. Pictured here, from left to right, are: Ferrando; Larry Hall, president of Texas; Donny O'Banion, president of Motor Home Specialist; Don Strollo, president of East Region; Jim Humble, president of West Region; and Brad Leach, president of Arizona.

RV and camp and travel there, that is a major benefit that we're able to bring to the table. And in expanding our network of both sales and service.

**RV PRO: Moving forward, do you see RV Retailer continuing to grow primarily by acquisitions? Or by a mix of acquisitions and new store builds?**

**Ferrando:** We'll do both. We will continue to grow by acquisition. We also have some great Greenfield new stores that we're





Members of Bill Plemmons RV World and the RV Retailer team are pictured in front of the dealership following the announcement in January 2021 that RV Retailer would acquire the North Carolina RV dealership. RV Retailer grew rapidly in 2021 thanks to acquisitions.



Ferrando (second from left) is pictured with RV Retailer team members at the dealership's Airstream of Tampa store, which was recognized in July 2020 as the No. 1-ranked Airstream store in the world. RV Retailer has eight stores in Florida, including its newly opened RV One store in Jacksonville, Fla.

Ferrando (center) is pictured here with Jason Lippert (left), president and CEO of Lippert Components, and Don Clark, president and CEO of Grand Design. Ferrando says cultivating strong relationships with suppliers and OEMs is a priority for RV Retailer.



building. We just opened a new store in Jacksonville, Fla. — our eighth location in Florida. And it gets us into Jacksonville, which is the No. 2 market in Florida. So that's a great example. And then we have other stores under construction right now in Texas and South Carolina, so we'll continue to do both.

**RV PRO: Why is it, do you think, that dealers are selling to RV Retailer versus Camping World or one of the other players out there?**

**Ferrando:** I think we offer a compelling opportunity for selling dealers. One, we have a great reputation. So, we are incredibly focused on respecting the legacy of the business that's been built by the seller.

Dealers put their blood, sweat and tears into building their businesses and they want to know that we're going to preserve all of the good that's in that business — that we're going to take care of their people, that we're going to provide their people great opportunities moving forward and that we'll be able to successfully grow that business and add value to it. ...

We can also move quickly and we're very skilled. We understand the industry, the business and we know how to get deals done. Our management team has 250 years of auto and RV experience, so we can navigate things very quickly and skillfully and also get it done with the manufacturers. Not only did they approve our acquisitions, but they are often adding additional brands to sell from the locations that we acquire.

**RV PRO: You were formerly a top executive with the AutoNation car dealership group, which became a juggernaut through acquisitions. Is there a kind of a playbook from AutoNation that you are able to use in your role as president and CEO of RV Retailer?**

**Ferrando:** There's a lot of differences between auto and RV, but there's also a lot that's applicable from the auto business that's good. So, we took all of the positive, good things out of automotive that could apply over into RV, but also really created a company focused around building a great customer experience in RV and bringing on a very talented RV leadership team by acquiring the best dealers on the planet early in our existence and then they are part of our management team.

There's a lot of things that I've learned in my career. Working for a great entrepreneur like Wayne Huizenga (founder of AutoNation), taking all of the best of that, while also not replicating the things that either wouldn't apply or that didn't work in the past. It's been a very customized approach here to build a great company in the short amount of time that we've been able to do it.

**RV PRO: Did you personally visit every dealership that joined the RV Retailer group last year? If so, what message do you share with the employees of those stores?**

**Ferrando:** Yes, I did close to 100 store visits last year, including every one of the 52 stores we acquired. And not only me, but our whole team — senior team, ownership, leadership team — goes out to these visits.



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**Ferrando cuts the ribbon on RV Retailer's North Carolina training center for fixed operations team members. RV Retailer has three training facilities nationwide, which include classroom training facilities, as well as more than 100 service bays across the three training centers for hands-on tech training.**

We welcome associates into the company, ensuring that we have a great transition up through the closing of the acquisition. We talk about the culture we're building. We talk about the investments that we will make and the growth that they can expect in their store that will allow them to have higher incomes and also a great career with us.

So, we take a very high-touch approach, because culture is very important. We also have a great story to share with passion about who we are and what we're going to do. There's just incredible value in doing that. There's really nothing more important.

**RV PRO: As a related question, once a dealership joins the RV Retailer family, what changes and what stays the same?**

**Ferrando:** We take all the good from the business that we acquire – and everything they do well, we strive to keep in place.

And then what we want to do is provide great leadership, great training and development resources. So, we're taking people and putting them into our RVR University to give them training and support to do their jobs better and advance their careers.

We're also bringing investments in facilities in a lot of stores that we acquire. Some are great facilities while for others we do an immediate upgrade right when we close the transaction to improve the sales and service experience. In some cases, we're building all-new stores and relocating.

A good example of that is when we acquired the Airstream dealership in Austin, Texas. It was operating out of a double-wide (trailer) with a great location on I-35 but really not an appro-

priate facility. We're making a huge investment to build a flagship Airstream dealership there to support the greater Austin market.

**RV PRO: Are there other changes that customers might see?**

**Ferrando:** We're also improving the customer experience with our RV Complete – a complete package of products that provide peace of mind for our customers, along with our mobile app, which allows us to build out the customer experience after the sale.

And then we have a huge focus on the service side of the business. Some dealerships we acquire do that very well and others don't or aren't as invested in that side. In a dealership, typically over half of the associates will be in the service side of the business, and we're making big investments there.

**RV PRO: Specifically as it relates to RV techs, how would you describe the situation for RV Retailer? And, is there anything more the company can do to?**

**Ferrando:** So, first off, no, we don't have enough techs – and the whole industry doesn't.

So, the service side of the business is a huge focus for us because there is a massive unmet demand for RV service.

Service is a great business and a growth business – and we're growing it significantly. And if you do it well, it's also a way to build incredible customer loyalty, where our data shows that if we keep a customer that buys from us and service them and do a good job of it, they are three times as likely to come back and buy again.

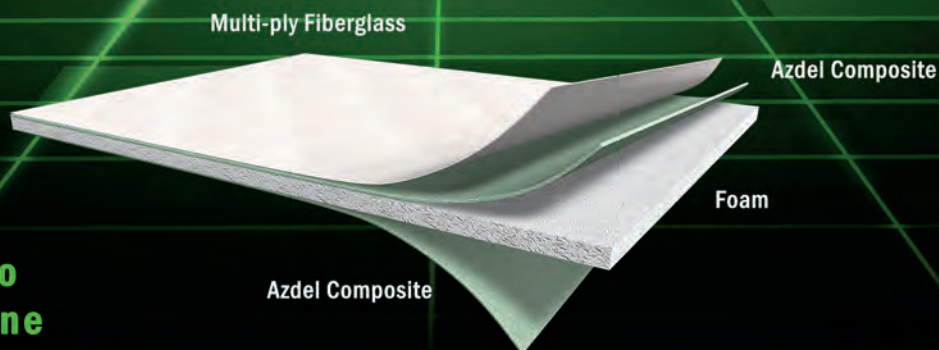
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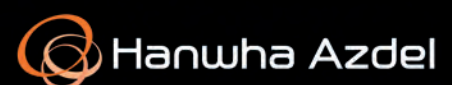
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**Barry Lawson (second from left), the retiring general manager of Lifestyle RVs in Grain Valley, Mo., is pictured receiving the Lifetime Achievement at the Leadership Summit for his contributions to RV Retailer and the RV industry. Pictured with Lawson is Jim Humble, president of RV Retailer's West region, Mrs. Lawson, and Ferrando.**

dramatically. We want to net add over 200 techs this year ... and the way we're going to do that is through our investments in training. We have a tech mentor apprentice program that we launched last year. We have 60 skilled techs that are trained mentors.

They come and get certified in our mentor apprentice structured program and then we are able to either hire individuals into the tech apprentice program, and in 90 to 180 days, they can become a Level One certified tech, or we're also talking to people in our dealerships, like lot porters and detailers that raise their hand and say, 'Hey, I'd love to be a technician' and we can put them in the technical apprentice program.

We also have a major RVTI (RV Technical Institute) partnership, where we provide all of the RVTI training and certifications for no cost to our techs. We're really pushing all of our techs to get through that program and get Level One certified. Level Two will be coming soon.

We have this huge investment in training techs and in taking apprentices in and being able to grow techs organically that way as we go forward. That will be an open-ended driver of our service business for a long time.

***RV PRO: And RV Retailer has designated training facilities for service department employees, correct?***

**Ferrando:** Correct. We picked three dealerships geographically. They are three of our biggest stores with big service operations. We have one in Dallas-Fort Worth in Texas for Central, one in Salt Lake City in Utah for the West, and then one in Charlotte, N.C., for the East. They all have university-caliber classroom training facilities where up to 100 RVR leaders and associates can be in a classroom setting with state-of-the-art learning capabilities you find at most universities.

So, this week (in mid-February) we ran a service advisor and service manager program at the same time. They did some learning together and then broke into separate classes.

And we also have well over 100 service bays between those three stores for hands-on tech training at those locations. So, it represents a multi-million-dollar investment on our part in really high-caliber training facilities where we can conduct an ever-growing number of great training programs for our people.

***RV PRO: Earlier you mentioned RV Complete. What is it, exactly, and how you believe it helps RV Retailer?***



**Members of RV Retailer's executive team are pictured at the Leadership Summit. They are, from left to right: Chris Glenn, vice president of service, parts and technology; Kurt Hornung, vice president of finance and insurance; Raul Rodriguez, senior vice president of corporate development; Ferrando; John Rizzo, executive vice president, chief financial officer and treasurer; Taylore Elliott, vice president and chief human resources officer; Tim Benter, corporate vice president and general counsel; and Famous Rhodes, chief marketing officer and chief technical officer.**



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*“Service is a great business and a growth business – and we’re growing it significantly. And if you do it well, it’s also a way to build incredible customer loyalty ...”*

**Ferrando:** If you think about the customer experience for a lot of dealers, it ends when you complete a sale. The customer takes delivery of the unit, goes on their way, and then it’s ‘See you later.’

We’re in this for the long term, so we wanted to figure out: How can we support and give the customer peace of mind after the purchase and build a great relationship with the customer?

So, we came up with RV Complete: A suite of protection products that we offer in every store. We built out an incredible, innovative mobile app, RV Complete, that every customer has. And it’s got just a range of exceptional benefits from 24/7 365 day roadside technical assistance.

Any new or used unit that’s purchased from RV Retailer comes with RV Complete. The customer gets that for free for a year. They can also buy up to five years of coverage.

As part of RV Complete, we have a call center (staffed by) certified technicians. It’s not just roadside assistance issue, but any technical issue a customer might have, like getting the awning to deploy or the water heater doesn’t work. You name the problem, we can try and address it with our technical assistance program.

We’ve also got a Trip Wizard that is built for (a customer’s specific) RV. So, if you have a fifth wheel, we enter that into your app when you buy your RV, and then the app acts like Google Maps or Apple Maps, but it gives you the safest route based upon the

weight and size of your unit and the fact that you’re in an RV to travel. Customers absolutely love that.

We’ve also got a feature that you can request a service appointment on your app. And we’ll be focused on building that out over the coming months and years. ...

We launched it (RV Complete) last year, and we’re adding features and benefits to it all the time to improve it based on customer feedback, customer focus groups and our associates.

**RV PRO: It sounds like you are judging RV Retailers’ success by more than the number of stores it has and the number of RVs it sells?**

**Ferrando:** Yes, it’s all around two areas: building an exceptional culture around our associates and the other part is the customer experience, from sales to service to the ownership lifecycle, while helping our customers pursue their dreams, create lifetime memories, see America and travel with family and friends.

So, the quality of how we do all that is how I measure things at the end of the day. If we do that really well, we will also continue to grow in dramatic fashion. And our manufacturers will appreciate what we’re doing for them and we’ll continue to be able to attract great talent.

That’s how I measure it. **RVP**



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# Dealership Merger Mania Continues

Brokers say rising economic uncertainty won't end the trend this year.

By Al Lewis



*"We are consummating transactions with dealerships of all sizes across the country – from small, medium, and large single rooftops to multi-dealership groups."*

**– Jesse Stopnitzky, partner,  
Performance Brokerage Services**

**B**rokers and advisors who put together mergers and acquisitions for RV dealerships say business is as brisk as ever and shows no sign of slowing in 2022.

"Values and the volume of transactions are at all-time highs, certainly for the whole industry and for our company as well," says Jesse Stopnitzky, a partner at Irvine, Calif.-based Performance Brokerage Services. "And for 2022, we absolutely expect this level of buy-sell activity to continue."

It may come down to a case of go big or go home.

Scott Degnan, a former Winnebago executive turned buy-sell advisor, predicts the current consolidation wave will go the way of most others, creating giants that can benefit from economies of scale, offer a wider variety of product lines, access public financial markets, negotiate better deals with manufacturers, and dominate sales.

"We believe in the next two years, 60 percent of the RVs that are sold in North America will be sold by one of 10 dealership groups," says Degnan, partner and co-founder of Denver-based RV Business Solutions. "It's definitely moving in that direction. ... It's been crazy these past couple of years."

To be sure, no one can foresee how long M&As can continue at the current pace, and some key hurdles are beginning to emerge.





"There's danger lurking around every corner," says Jim Bates, a partner at Jackim Woods & Co., an M&A advisory firm in Libertyville, Ill. "There's uncertainty everywhere you look."

Inflation recently hit a 40-year high, interest rates are rising, and the global supply chain remains constricted amid a pandemic that's lasted longer than anyone had predicted. Chip shortages are shutting down automotive manufacturing lines and slowing production of many of the appliances and devices that go into building an RV.

"All that's going to keep downward pressures on valuations," Bates says. "Nobody's going to overpay. ... And if valuations go down, are people going to sell, or are they going to wait?"

For now, however, valuations for RV dealerships are holding at peak highs. The pandemic – far from crippling the industry – led to a surge in sales as consumers sought safer ways to travel and, in many cases, found they were no longer tethered to an office and could work remotely. As a result, RV shipments to dealers in 2021 reached a record high of 600,240 units, according to the RV Industry Association.

And while supply chain constraints may have challenged dealers' ability to maintain inventories, they also resulted in higher RV sale prices, and in the end, rising revenues for dealerships and increasing valuations.



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*“We believe in the next two years, 60 percent of the RVs that are sold in North America will be sold by one of 10 dealership groups. It’s definitely moving in that direction. ... It’s been crazy these past couple of years.”*

**– Scott Degnan, partner and co-founder, RV Business Solutions**

“Some of this is being driven by sellers seeing this as the best possible time to exit,” says Kevin Nill, a partner at Jacksonville, Fla.-based Haig Partners. “But if valuations recede in the next couple of years, there will still be people who want to sell for family reasons, or to go do something else. ... Bottom line: I think consolidation will continue – but not at this rapid pace.”

#### **Global M&A Activity at All-Time High**

RV dealership transactions are coming together against a backdrop of record-setting levels for mergers and acquisitions in all sectors globally. Research firm Dealogic recently reported that the value of M&A activity rose 63 percent in 2021, to more than \$5.6 trillion. It was the first time activity topped \$5 trillion and eclipsed the record set in 2007 of \$4.42 trillion.

The corporate world is awash in cash thanks to years of stable profitability, healthy balance sheets, and historically low interest rates. These factors have fueled the rise in deal making in just about every industry – and RV dealerships are no exception.

Private equity, publicly traded stock and bank financing have all trickled into a highly fragmented industry, long dominated by family owners, making it increasingly ripe for mergers and acquisitions.

***Private equity, publicly traded stock and bank financing have all trickled into a highly fragmented industry, long dominated by family owners, making it increasingly ripe for mergers and acquisitions.***





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The playing field is large. The U.S. Census Bureau counts more than 2,600 dealerships with combined annual revenues of nearly \$26 billion. It reports that the average sales of an RV dealership in 2017 – the latest figures available – totaled \$9.7 million. However, pressure is mounting for these companies to get bigger to compete with larger dealerships.

Dealership acquisitions are being fueled by a mix of large and emerging players. Backed by Hanover, Md.-based private equity firm Redwood Capital Investments, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.-based RV Retailer acquired 52 stores in 2021. The dealership group, headed by former Autonation executive Jon Ferrando and his business partners (see related story on page 26), now encompasses more than 90 stores in 26 states.

Lincolnshire, Ill.-based Camping World Holdings and Tampa, Fla.-based Lazydays Holdings also have been aggressive about acquisitions.

In its most recent earnings report in November, Camping World said it acquired 12 dealerships through the first nine months of 2021, using cash to complete the transactions. It said it spent \$99.7 million on the acquisitions and another \$61.1 million to purchase real property from the sellers of these businesses.

Camping World promises more deals are on the way.

Regional players including Campers Inn and Haugen RV Group also have been adding stores to their growing portfolios of dealerships.



*“Acquisitions are taking place in all parts of the country, but certainly the larger consolidators focus more on growth areas of the country, such as the ‘Smile Belt’ – mid-Atlantic through the Southeast, across the southern part of the country to California.”*

**– Kevin Nill, partner, Haig Partners**



**The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the average sales of an RV dealership in 2017 – the latest figures available – totaled \$9.7 million. Sales have undoubtedly increased since then.**

## Deals Across the Board

The deals are happening everywhere.

“We are consummating transactions with dealerships of all sizes across the country – from small, medium, and large single rooftops to multi-dealership groups,” Stopnitzky says.

His company, Performance Brokerage Services, which his father founded 30 years ago, is an auto dealership brokerage that includes RV dealerships. It has been involved with more than 560 dealerships with more than \$8.5 billion in transactional value since its founding in 1994.

“Northeast is likely the most active – but it is truly nationwide ... and Canada,” says Degan. He and his business partner, Mike Lankford, started RV Business Solutions last year, but together they have a combined 60 years of experience in the RV business. The consulting and advisory firm focuses solely on RV dealerships.

“Acquisitions are taking place in all parts of the country but certainly the larger consolidators focus more on growth areas of the country, such as the ‘Smile Belt’ – mid-Atlantic through the Southeast, across the southern part of the country to California,” says Nill.

His firm, Haig Partners, was founded in 2014. It is an investment banking firm focused on auto, heavy truck and RV dealerships – and it’s been very busy.

“RV is very active, but it’s unfair to compare to automotive,” Nill says. “The sheer size of the automotive industry means the number and size of transactions are far greater than RV. But the pace of RV consolidation will continue as the large groups have a greater competitive advantage over smaller stores or groups.”

Many of the sellers are long-time owners looking to retire, says Bates, whose firm, Jackim Woods, is a middle-market M&A



advisor with clients across the United States. The firm boasts 25 years of experience and RV dealerships are but one of its target areas. The company works in the education, business services and manufacturing sectors.

### What Sellers Should Look For

Consulting a broker or advisor is one of the first steps for an RV dealer looking to sell, according to the brokers interviewed for this article.

“Experience in representing sellers of transportation retailers – principally RV and automotive dealers – is critical,” says Nill. “Because the industries are unique, expertise in how to communicate the value of the dealership, opportunities for growth, etc., are critical for a seller. Negotiating the terms of the purchase of an RV dealership are far different than selling a general commercial business and you need a broker who has negotiated highly complex asset purchase agreements in the industry.”

Stopnitzky says look for depth in staffing, resources and a solid network in the industry.

“And evaluating the fee structure, consider whether an upfront fee is charged in the form of a retainer, or like our firm, only a success fee is paid at closing. One should also seriously consider the reputation, integrity, and responsiveness of the broker. Good brokers become intimately involved and actively manage the sale process, providing constant communication and updates on activity flow.”

For many dealers, it’s an emotional process, according to Degnan.

“RV dealers need to remember that they are best suited to continue focusing on what they do best – sell RV’s and service their customers, allowing their deal team to focus on selling their business.”

He adds that RV dealers need to have their house in order as they prepare to sell. This includes: a minimum of three years of audited financials, and idea about what their business is worth and how much they want for it, and one or two trusted employees who can become part of their “deal team” along with their advisor or broker.

### What Sellers Need

Just as rising home prices can get homeowners to think about selling, higher business valuations have dealership owners considering exit plans.

They may have cut expenses during the pandemic, received a PPP loan to bolster their balance sheets, and then enjoyed a spike in sales as demand for RVs exploded. Expressed as a multiple of revenues or earnings, they know their dealerships are worth more on paper now than they were a couple years ago.

“Some buyers want dealerships more than others and are willing to pay a higher premium because they really want that location or they want those product lines, or they want to get into that particular trade area or market,” says Degnan, of RV Business Solutions. “But in the end, to a seller, a multiple really shouldn’t be what they’re focused on.”







*“The past doesn’t dictate the future. Just ask Blockbuster Video. Let’s say you have the best year you’ve ever had ... a sophisticated buyer is going to say the value of anything is the value of its future – and the future has a lot of uncertainty.”*

**– Jim Bates, partner,  
Jackim Woods & Co.**

Bates, of Jackim Woods, says rising multiples are the wrong way to look at the decision to sell a dealership.

“The past doesn’t dictate the future. Just ask Blockbuster Video,” he says. “Let’s say you have the best year you’ve ever had ... a sophisticated buyer is going to say the value of anything is the value of its future – and the future has a lot of uncertainty.”

Instead, sellers who are often approaching their retirement years anyway need to think more about their financial needs for the next chapters of their lives.

“How necessary is it to squeeze the very last dime out of this deal to make sure that we’ve adequately added to your existing

nest egg and that you’re going to be able to live comfortably – and not run out of money before you die?” says Bates. “I call it the ‘are-you-going-to-end-up-living-in-your-kid’s basement plan.’”

Sellers may believe their business is worth \$5 million, but what if they ended up selling for \$3.5 million?

“If you’re going to be OK, what difference does it make?” says Bates.

What sellers need most, Bates says, is pre-planning before considering any transaction, taking a careful look at financial needs and balancing them against market realities.

### **What Buyers Want**

Buyers, on the other hand, are typically interested in specific locations and product lines that complement their businesses, acreage and quality facilities, as well as growing markets rather than those on the decline. But top of mind is scalability.

That’s, after all, what makes combinations profitable.

“It’s a very scalable business,” says Nill. “Once you build your infrastructure, you can begin to plug in additional locations without incurring additional expenses. You’ve got your director of fixed operations, your director of variable operations, you’ve got your HR department – those costs are now spread over a lot of locations.”

Adding strong management teams also is part of that equation. Stopnitzky says buyers want to see healthy company cultures that foster solid reputations and goodwill in the communities they serve.

Sometimes these sorts of fundamentals can get lost in the harried quest for acquisitions, but taking care of employees and taking care of customers is taking care of the long-term health of a business, according to Stopnitzky.

“RV dealers are selling a vehicle for a family to create lifetime memories together,” he says. “What a beautiful concept. That’s the sales process. And that starts at the top.” **RV**

### **Read More About Dealer M&A Activity:**

<http://rvpro.link/85w1u>

<http://rvpro.link/zcy3m>

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## SPECIAL PRODUCT FOCUS:

# Hitches and Towing

*RVers need reliable towing and hitching products for a safe and hassle-free experience out on the road. This month's section features various products for towing and hitching operations, ranging from heavy-duty fifth-wheel hitches to tow balls, towing mirrors and trailer camera systems.*

*For more information on any of the products in this section, type the website address that appears below a respective product listing into your website browser. Viewers of the magazine's digital edition can click their mouse on any listing to be taken directly to the respective company's website.*

## BRAKE CONTROLLER WITH COLOR LED DISPLAY

**Horizon Global**, Plymouth, Mich., introduces the Prodigy iD. The Prodigy iD is a first-of-its-kind brake controller that seamlessly integrates a color LED display into a vehicle's dash, providing easy-to-read diagnostics and alerts. Enjoy fingertip control using the rotary knob to easily adjust settings. RVers can put complete control in their hands by downloading the Tekonsha Edge mobile app. With a unique ability to switch between proportional and timed braking, the Prodigy iD is designed to meet RVers every towing need.

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**ICON Technologies**, Winkler, Manitoba, Canada, presents the AeroShield Wind Deflector. The aerodynamic design of the AeroShield Wind Deflector ensures smoother handling – as it reduces overall wind resistance, and practically eliminates turbulent winds trapped in the truck box. Enjoy better fuel economy and decrease wear on the vehicle. Tool-less installation with no permanent adaptation needed. The AeroShield utilizes hooks and straps going into the rain gutter of most modern tow vehicles.

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**Blue Ox**, Pender, Neb., offers its Adjustable Ball Mount, which is adjustable in height for level towing with a pre-installed 2" ball. Use it in the rise or drop position. Included clamshell converts the ball from 2" to 2-5/16". It will not drag on the ground like dual-ball mounts. Four models to choose from: 4" Drop/Rise, 2" Receiver, 10K; 4" Drop/Rise, 2-1/2" Receiver, 12K; 7" Drop/Rise, 2" Receiver, 10K; 7" Drop/Rise, 2-1/2" Receiver, 12K.

[www.blueox.com](http://www.blueox.com)



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**NSA RV Products**, Iola, Kan., presents its Universal Taillight Wiring Harness, designed to offer the ultimate in simplicity. Mount the 3-1/2" LED light bars under the back of any towed vehicle or trailer. This universal wiring kit connects to any four-way flat trailer connector on the back of the towing vehicle. It is designed to be very user friendly and reliable.

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[www.StrombergCarlson.com](http://www.StrombergCarlson.com)



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**Camco Mfg.**, Greensboro, N.C., offers the Eaz-Lift ReCurve R6 featuring premium adaptive sway control for safer, easier towing. Adaptive sway control is designed to make turning effortless. The hitch controls sway for normal driving – but when RVers turn, the sway control will automatically disengage for smoother maneuvering. Simply turn the sway control completely off as needed, such as in dangerous or icy road conditions. The R6 has a sleek, streamlined design that makes the hitch and the trailer move as one.

[www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)



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**REDARC**, Adelaide, Australia, presents the Tow-Pro Liberty Electric Brake Controller. A true workhorse, REDARC's Tow-Pro Liberty electric trailer brake controller features an easy-to-use, in-dash mount remote head. The in-dash system makes for quick installation and ensures your customers won't be knocking their knees. REDARC says the brake controller is designed for everyday towing and is built to last a lifetime. Vehicle-specific install accessories are available.

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**CURT**, Eau Claire, Wis., offers the CrossWing fifth wheel hitch, offering the best of both worlds by packing extraordinary strength into one lightweight hitch. With a main body weight of only 60 pounds, CURT says it is 65 percent lighter than most traditional fifth wheel hitches while still offering a 20,000-pound weight capacity, so strength and muscle are not sacrificed. It is made with high-grade steel versus aluminum to ensure that its durability and solidity are truly uncompromised.

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**Valterra**, Mission Hills, Calif., presents its Mighty Cord 5th Wheel/Gooseneck Harness. Mount this 7-way, RV-style connector in a truck bed to simplify hookup of a fifth wheel or gooseneck trailer. The harness plugs into existing wiring and it retains use of factory 7-pole at the bumper. The connector mounts in the truck bed sidewall, tailgate post, or wheel well. It plugs into factory wiring – no cutting or splicing. Molded cable and spring-loaded dust cover protects from the elements. Available in 7' and 10' lengths.

[www.valterra.com](http://www.valterra.com)



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**Bulletproof Hitches**, Bradenton, Fla., presents the Bulletproof Drop/Rise Hitch. BulletProof Hitches offers what it says is the highest-rated ball-mount bumper-pull hitch on the market, rated up to 36,000 pounds. Bulletproof has a hitch for every vehicle: 2", 2.5", and 3" shanks – 2" drop all the way up to a 16" drop! These fully adjustable hitches feature solid-steel construction, a lifetime warranty, and full line of accessories.

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### TPMS FOR TOWED VEHICLES

**Truck System Technologies**, San Antonio, presents its TPMS Sensor Tow Packs. TST offers two or four sensor Tow Packs, which can help protect a towed vehicle from tire-related issues. Compatible with any existing 507 or 770 Series System, TST's cap or flow-thru sensors provide peace of mind with real-time pressure and temperature monitoring. These can mix and match to make sure all vehicles, trailers, and toys are protected. Truck System Technologies is a Pressure System International company.

[www.tsttruck.com](http://www.tsttruck.com)



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Go to: [airliftcompany.com/squathappens](https://airliftcompany.com/squathappens)





## LARGE CARGO CARRIER

**Let's Go Aero**, Colorado Springs, Colo., presents its BlackBox PRO Slide-out Carrier. The new BlackBox PRO is a super-sized, 72"L by 32"W by 48"H extra-tall cargo carrier offering 64 cubic feet of storage space, ideal for the van life, for large bikes, including eBikes, trade equipment, group travel gear and more. The strong Twintube slide-out platform supports 500 pounds of gross weight and clears RV Sprinter and passenger van doors, truck tailgates, and large SUVs hatches.

[www.letsgoaero.com](http://www.letsgoaero.com)



## 21K MANUAL SLIDER FIFTH WHEEL HITCH

**Demco**, Boyden, Iowa, introduces the Recon Manual Slider, the latest addition to Demco's hitch lineup, with 14" of travel and easy sliding mechanics. This lightweight, 21K hitch is an easy two-piece install and removal in a truck bed. It features Demco's wrap-around jaw, as well as three different height adjustments (16-7/8", 18-1/8" and 19-3/8"). It also features Demco's standard double-pivot head. Like all Demco's fifth wheel hitches, it is proudly made in U.S.A.

[www.demco-products.com/](http://www.demco-products.com/)

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## AIR-RIDE FIFTH WHEEL HITCH FOR HEAVY-DUTY HAULERS

**PopUp Towing Products**, Chanute, Kan., introduces the ET Hitch. The ET air-ride fifth wheel hitch was designed for medium- and heavy-duty RV haulers. Many available models and options to accommodate trailers from 18K to 40K. Built-in auto leveling air ride technology sets the ET apart and provides full articulation head movement for a better towing experience. The combination of airbags and parallel link arm technology is designed to provide the best and smoothest ride possible.

[www.popuphitch.com](http://www.popuphitch.com)



## TOWED VEHICLE BRAKING SYSTEM

**Danko Mfg.**, Castle Rock, Colo., presents its RVibrake Shadow brake system. When flat towing a car, customers need a braking system that works to get them on the road quickly and allows them to focus on their family and the memories they're making. RVibrake

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## TIRE PRESSURE MONITORS FOR TOWABLES

**Advantage PressurePro**, Harrisonville, Mo., introduces the first TPMS designed specifically for towables. PULSE FX delivers PressurePro's first BYOD-based system, arming users with market-leading tire performance management at never-before-seen value. Allowing users to leverage existing smart devices to display real-time readings and alerts directly through the free PressurePro app, FX gives users 24/7 tire performance monitoring (on up to 40 tires), five customizable alerts, local notifications, vehicle/units storage and more.

[www.pressurepro.us](http://www.pressurepro.us)



## FAT TIRE BIKE CARRIER

**Rigid Hitch**, Burnsville, Minn., presents its V-Lectric Fat Pro Two Fat Tire eBike Carrier, Part No. BO0390. The company says its bike carrier is RV approved for both motorized and tow behind and fits a 2" receiver. This bike carrier has adjustable wheel cradles for varying bike sizes and frames. It has both upper and lower wheel cradles that provide four-point wheel touch for a fixed and level ride. In April, Part No. BO2301, will be available to expand this carrier to a four e-bike carrier.

<http://RigidHitch.com>



## SINGLE-POINT FIFTH WHEEL HITCH

**PullRite**, Mishawaka, Ind., offers the Single Point Super 5<sup>th</sup>, which combines the lightweight design and innovation of the SuperLite brand with PullRite's exclusive automatic latching and locking hitch plate. This hitch mounts directly to any OE or aftermarket 2-5/16" gooseneck ball. The flexible design and offset allow for the king pin to be positioned rear of the axle, allowing for tighter turning radius regardless of the tow vehicle. The Super 5<sup>th</sup> Single Point has been tested to and rated to a 24K SAE J2638.

[www.PullRite.com](http://www.PullRite.com)



## 40-TIRE TPMS CAPABLE SYSTEM

**TireMinder**, Stuart, Fla., introduces the TireMinder i10 RV Tire Monitor system. The TireMinder i10 color tire system can simultaneously view 10 tire readings per vehicle, auto-swap between front and rear vehicles and monitor up to four different vehicles with 40 tires in total. The system includes a high-powered signal booster, offers a 100' range and comes with a three-year warranty. Optional lightweight (0.7-ounce) – no need to balance the tire – flow-through transmitters are available. A free end cap display is included with qualifying product purchase.

[www.tireminder.com](http://www.tireminder.com)





## FIFTH WHEEL PIN BOX REPLACEMENT

**GEN-Y Hitch**, Nappanee, Ind., presents the Executive Fifth Wheel Pin Box replacement with gooseneck coupler, providing customers with a smoother ride. The built-in Torsion-Flex technology reduces up to 90 percent of inertia between truck and trailer, helping minimize movement. GEN-Y Hitch also has redesigned the overall profile to increase the unit's strength while reducing the overall weight by 17 percent. The levers on the auto-latch units have also been redesigned to provide much better leverage and minimize tension by up to 40 percent when disconnecting.

[www.genyhitch.com](http://www.genyhitch.com)

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### HITCH-MOUNTED MUDFLAP SYSTEM

**Rock Tamers**, Monument, Colo., offers the Rock Tamers Mudflap System. Designed to help customers “Protect What They Tow,” the hitch-mounted mudflap system easily fits over 2", 2.5" and 3" drawbars. The entire system can be quickly removed when the customer is done towing, so the flaps are only used when needed. Oversized and reinforced flaps can be cut to fit for maximum protection. Accessories available for heat protection, added visibility (LED bars), as well as the brand new protective screen for complete coverage in between the two flaps.

[www.cruiserframes.com/rocktamers.asp](http://www.cruiserframes.com/rocktamers.asp)



### BALL-TYPE TPMS

**Tuson RV Brakes**, Vernon Hills, Ill., offers the Internal Ball Sensor TPMS. The Tuson “ball-type” Internal Tire Pressure & Temperature Sensors are designed to make installation a snap. Simply drop the balls into the tires and air them up. The balls weigh less than 1 ounce and don’t affect tire balance. A receiver can be programmed for three different trailers with up to 10 sensors per truck/trailer combination. Strong RF sensor signals for 45-plus foot trailers. RVers can keep their existing valve stems. Five-year sensor battery life.

[www.tusonrvbrakes.com](http://www.tusonrvbrakes.com)



### WIRELESS OBSERVATION SYSTEM FOR TOWING

**ASA Electronics**, Elkhart, Ind., offers the Voyager Observation System, designed to make it easier than ever to install a wireless observation systems. ASA’s patented 2.0 WiSight technology allows the camera to transmit to a wireless Voyager monitor in real time, at freeway speeds. Users can get a system with the 4.3" screen (with Part No. WVSXP43) and a system with 7" screen (with Part No. WVSXP70).

[www.asaelectronics.com](http://www.asaelectronics.com)



### FRONT-MOUNTED RECEIVER HITCH

**Torklift International**, Sumner, Wash., offers the Torklift North Hitch, a front-mounted receiver hitch with a completely concealed design that does not affect ground clearance. This front receiver hitch requires zero modification for use of accessories, is designed to avoid airflow interference, and has a no-drill design that makes it extremely user-friendly. North Front Hitch designs are available for Ford, Chevy, RAM, and Mercedes. All Torklift products are made in the U.S.A. and come with a lifetime warranty.

[www.torklift.com](http://www.torklift.com)

### UNIVERSAL TOW BAR ADAPTER

**Roadmaster**, Vancouver, Wash., presents its Universal Tow Bar Adapter. A baseplate and its tow bar are typically designed by the same manufacturer, making it inconvenient to mix-and-match brands to a towed vehicle. With the introduction of Roadmaster’s Universal Tow Bar Adapter (Part No. O39-2), a Blue Ox, Demco or CURT tow bar simply pins onto late model Roadmaster base plates. The patent-pending adapter inserts into the Roadmaster baseplate and auto locks in place when rotated 90 degrees. It takes less than 10 seconds to connect and requires no tools/hardware.

<http://roadmasterinc.com>







## TOWING MIRRORS

**Milenco America**, South Bend, Ind., offers its Milenco Mirrors, which it touts as being the most popular tow mirrors in the world for good reason. Each SKU fits every vehicle back to 1991. Milenco's mirrors are tested in wind tunnels up to 120 mph with no vibration. The Grand Aero is large enough to see entire side of trailer. Buy six mirrors and get a free display stand.

[www.milenco.com/products/mirrors](http://www.milenco.com/products/mirrors)



## RV PARKING AID

**Reversemate**, Brisbane, Australia, presents its ReverseMate parking aide for motorhomes or trailers. ReverseMate is designed to make reversing a motorhome or trailer easier and safer when RVers arrive at a campsite. RVers simply inspect the site, set their markers and reverse. The built-in tape measure makes it easy to set out the position of the markers. Whether it's day or night, the markers are fitted with built-in LED lights, which provide illumination when reversing at night.

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## TRAILER CAMERA

**Hopkins Mfg.**, Emporia, Kan., presents the vueSMART Trailer Camera. The vueSMART is a do-it-yourself trailer camera that installs utilizing the existing trailer light. No rewiring required. LED lights eliminate the fear of backing into trailer into something, making backing into tight spots a cinch. The hi-definition camera delivers the widest angle behind the trailer at a full 152 degrees. A waterproof design will stand up to the harshest of environments. The camera also features a Wi-Fi enabled wireless signal that sends crystal clear video to any smart device.

[www.hopkinstowingsolutions.com/vuesmart/](http://www.hopkinstowingsolutions.com/vuesmart/)



## TRAILER SUSPENSION UPGRADE

**SuperSprings International**, Carpinteria, Calif., offers its Trailer SummoSprings. Manufactured from micro-cellular polyurethane, this trailer suspension upgrade is designed to remove sway, hop and vibration. With zero-maintenance, these airless air springs are designed to increase overall driver control and ride comfort when towing. SummoSprings manufactures two applications: one for trailers with spring-under axle configurations and one for spring-over. This solution provides an average G-force reduction of 68 percent to the trailer.

<http://superspringsinternational.com/trailer-sumosprings>



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## TPMS FOR TOWABLES

**JR Products**, Clarence Center, N.Y., offers the PressurePro FX 2 Wheel Kit, which the company says is the first TPMS designed specifically for towables. Pulse FX delivers PressurePro's first BYOD based system, arming users with market-leading tire performance management at never-before-seen value. Allowing users to leverage existing smart devices to display real time readings and alerts directly through the free, PressurePro app.

[www.jrproducts.net](http://www.jrproducts.net)

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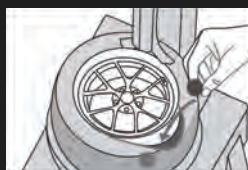


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# MAKING WAVES

By Jordan Benshop

**Land ‘N’ Sea Distributing and Keller Marine & RV spotlight the current state of the marine industry, what hybrid distribution entails and how dealers can “set sail” both on the water and on land.**

**RV**ing is only one slice of the red-hot outdoor recreation pie – and some distributors, plus their dealers, are finding success in spaces where they can cool down (literally).

The marine market, much like RV, started out as a general concept – buy a boat and hit the water. But as time and consumer interests evolved over time, so has the industry itself.

## Surf vs. Turf

When it comes to selling boats and RVs, one thing is certain – money *does* buy happiness. These markets don’t rely on product necessity, but rather the availability of consumers’ discretionary income. While the notion has long been both industries’ greatest measure of success, another factor has become just as essential – if not more – than consumers’ extra cash.

“That’s discretionary time,” says Mike Keller, president of Keller Marine & RV, which started its marine business in 1958 and joined the RV industry roughly 10 years later. “If income is good, gas prices are good and interest rates are good, we think it’ll be a great year. But what we saw through COVID was buyers with time – and nobody had a great measure of that.”

In the marine industry especially, time could be regarded as a currency. Keller says he tells dealers to forget hour meters on boats. If a customer looks at their per-hour usage one year, they’ll think it’s too expensive and sell it the next, he says.

“If you ever find a way to get people more time, you’ll get more sales,” he says of dealers. “(Consumers) don’t feel good about spending the money when they don’t get to use it – and people with money usually don’t have time.”

While the idea affects both marine and RV, the latter is more flexible. Consumers get more use out of an RV than just camping. For instance, a buyer isn’t taking their boat to a NASCAR race.



**The Keller Marine & RV family stands in front of the company’s building. Pictured from left to right are: Mike Keller, president; Lori Morrow, director of marketing; and Michael T. Keller, director of sales.**

KELLER MARINE & RV PHOTOS COURTESY OF KELLER, LAND ‘N’ SEA  
FILE PHOTOS FROM THE DISTRIBUTOR’S 2016 DEALER SHOW.





Bio-Kleen's Tracy Lynn Kowalski (behind booth) and Tim Kowalski (in yellow shirt) chat with dealers at the Keller Marine & RV show. Bio-Kleen is one of a number of suppliers that sell both RV and marine products at the Keller show.



A display at Keller Marine & RV's dealer show showcases a variety of marine product offerings.



"Boating is just boating – that's it. But an RV enables you to go boating," Keller explains. "An RV is a means to an end, but a boat is an end to itself."

Over at Land 'N' Sea Distributing (LNS), which got its start in the marine market and later expanded into the RV industry, time also played an important factor in industry differences.

"Boating is normally a day sport, and RVing is normally a weekend, week or full-time sport," says Tony Paigo, sales director of RV at LNS. "There are very little differences (between markets). RVing is a longer event, but they are otherwise similar industries."

In the early '90s and 2000s, Keller says one circumstance shifted the way consumers, and therefore distributors and dealers, viewed the two recreation markets: The internet.

"Leisure time blew up and fragmented," Keller says. "As that started, the marine slice got slivered in the recreational pie. But RVing is enabling the whole pie."

The internet's explosion meant more people with like interests could gather without being in close proximity. The RV lent itself to that, he says.

"You could be in Denver one month and California the next. It let people get together temporarily and then go back to where they live," Keller says. "More subgroups were happening, and those groups got together in RVs a lot."

However, when it comes to both industries, Land 'N' Sea notes similarities – such as being recreational, seasonal and geared toward making memories in the great outdoors – have made the distributor proud to invest its service model in supplying both markets.

### Making the 'Sail'

In the RV marketplace today, Keller notes that most growth comes from the fact that more RVs are being sold than ever before. The RV Industry Association said more than 600,000 units were





**Dometic team members converse with dealers and take orders during a Land ‘N’ Sea show. Dometic is one of several suppliers at Land ‘N’ Sea shows that serve both RV and boat dealers.**

shipped in 2021, with another 600,000 projected to be shipped in 2022 – compared to roughly 200,000 boats in the marine market. However, disregarding numbers, Keller says the RV industry can learn a thing or two from boating.

“When I sell you an RV, if I don’t want buyer remorse, I should get inside your head and understand the desired experience,” he says.

If an RV customer wants office space for remote work, Keller says he’ll focus on ideal packages – a unit with three tables and onboard Wi-Fi, for example. Like vacation planning, when travelers book daily excursion packages before the trip, Keller says he sees the same opportunity with RVs. Dealers need to get inside the customer’s head and sell an experience – not an RV. It’s no longer good enough to say, “here’s an RV, hope you like it,” he says.

“Boating saw that happen 25 years ago. People used to buy a boat – now they buy a wakeboard boat, pontoon or bass boat. The purchase is specifically tied to the activity,” Keller says. “That’s why the runabout (general boat) business is nothing.

“RV didn’t make that jump like marine did then,” he adds. “The more the dealer gets involved in the experience, and accessorizes the RV to do that, the more successful that dealer is with accessories and selling RVs.”

As a distributor, Keller says his staff focuses on training RV dealers to sell experiences – which is why the company’s accessory business is booming.

“We feel like if you buy every accessory on the coach before you drive off the lot, you win, Mr. Dealer,” Keller says. “If I wait for them to come back, it’s probably not successful. If I wait for them to buy a part on Amazon, it’s not successful.

“That’s us. That’s where Keller’s mind is and it’s something we learned from the marine business. They’ve been doing it that way for years.”

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**Keller Marine & RV's warehouse in Port Trevorton, Pa., (pictured above and directly below) carries about 25,000 RV and marine parts.**



**Land 'N' Sea said its 2016 show attracted about 300 exhibitors. The distributor has added many more marine and RV suppliers since that time.**

## Finding Middle Ground

When it comes to serving both industries, LNS says its strong established relationships with suppliers on both sides have put the company in a unique position to capitalize dealer advantages. The distributor has more than 150 sales representatives spanning both markets.

"As it relates to suppliers, there's a significant overlap," says Ken Ferleger, LNS vice president of sales. "At LNS, we are leveraging the core capabilities of wholesale distribution to provide same-day or next-day service."

Crossover regarding consumers also is apparent.

"What I see with boaters is, they usually have Class C motor-homes," Keller says. "It depends on the area of the country you're in."

Keller Marine & RV is headquartered in Port Trevorton, Pa., where he says "pickup truck campers" – or slide-ins – are common for bass fishers.

"A bass guy going to a tournament can put a slide-in inside the truck and stay overnight at the water," Keller says. "If you have a travel trailer, you can't pull a boat behind it."

Park model RVs, which are more permanent, are often seen parked along lakes and places with water access, he says, because people can leave their camper and bring the boat up during season. The park model business expanded with boating, Keller says, also because boating has more limitations – such as those made by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"There are places where you can't build to the edge of the water, you can only put temporary things there," Keller says. "RVs work well for that – you can move in and out based on high water."

## A Change in the Winds

As with all industries, especially industrial, market shifts were inevitable following the COVID-19 pandemic. The lifestyle change caused families to spend more time on safer activities, with boating and RVing being a preferred way to enjoy family time, says Aimee Vera, director of marketing and e-commerce at LNS.

On one hand, LNS says the marine marketplace saw a consolidation of larger dealers at the manufacturing and dealer level.

"Demographics of boaters have changed dramatically," adds Ferleger. "It's recreation where all families are more involved, there's more diversity and the average age of boaters is becoming younger and younger."

Compared to the RV industry, Keller says he considers the boating demographic to have always been younger on average.

"Demographics became very similar (in the two industries) over the last part of my career compared to the beginning. You can easily see the same person now in both markets, and you wouldn't have seen that in the early days," Keller says. "Demo-



*“Demographics of boaters have changed dramatically. ... There’s more diversity and the average age of boaters is becoming younger and younger.”*

**– Ken Ferleger, LNS vice president of sales**

graphics in RV really came down – it used to just be retired people.

“When I was growing up, marine was a whole lot different than RV. At the Chicago Boat Show, you’d see three-quarter naked bikini models laying on boats. That’s not OK now – it’s very different,” Keller says.

Consumer mindsets are very different, too. What works for one buyer may not work for the next, he says.

“In comes the COVID consumer, a person so different from what I call ‘Tim the Toolman Taylor’ – an RVer who wanted interaction,” Keller says. “Now, people don’t want to see anybody. They don’t want social interaction – that’s why they’re RVing and over there in the world of boondocking and solar power. They’re up to speed on ideas through social media.”

New consumer mindsets mean emerging trends within both markets. Electric vehicles are becoming a hot topic in RV, but the marine industry has been ahead of that trend for “a long time.”

“There’s been big electric outboards for a while, with high horsepower. And they’re going to get bigger,” Keller says.

The marine industry was blessed with the “halo effect”, he adds. If someone says they own a yacht, that automatically comes with a high-profile reputation. Not so much for RV, he says.

“Marine just kind of lived off the reputation and didn’t do a

very good job of cultivating that,” Keller says. “RV struggled with reputation, but Go RVing and other things have done more to change its perception in the industry. That’s helping bring in the younger demographic.”

### **Tackling Supply Woes**

What is not uncommon to hear: Both industries continue to see supply chain challenges, Ferleger says.

“In spite of those challenges, we continue to invest heavily in inventory to supply our dealers with the high-quality service levels that they’re used to,” he adds.

What is often considered an industry issue is really more of a vendor hurdle.

“Many suppliers are now in both (markets) – not just RV or marine,” Keller says. “It’s such an easy business to be good at right now, but people shouldn’t get complacent.”

While most American companies would love to see more U.S. production amid supply chain hiccups, that’s not necessarily the problem, he says.

“It’s not U.S. labor costs – it’s U.S. labor. Its nonexistent,” Keller says. “We could have about 20 more workers than we have right now, and we’re just under 100.”

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**Dealers stream into the Land 'N' Sea show floor in Las Vegas in this file photo from 2016. The distributor says it stocks 80,000 marine and RV parts.**



**Land 'N' Sea President Michael F. Connors and Director of Marketing Aimee Vera are pictured at the distributor's 2016 show in Las Vegas, where they reported they were very happy with both the exhibitor and the attendee turnout.**



**Dealers crowd the hallway, preparing to enter the Land 'N' Sea show floor during the distributor's 2016 show in Las Vegas.**

Attracting qualified talent has become a daunting task for many industries, but especially at the technician level for RV and marine. Being a place people want to work is the goal, Keller says.

"It's a free agency market, and I don't mind paying more if you show me something more. You have to pay the higher prices to attract good workers and good people. If you don't – good luck," he says.

He says another factor impacting the flow in both industries is product proliferation. In RV, he notes roughly 50 different city water fills on his shelves – yet they all have the same use.

"The reason that matters is because we don't have enough volume to have all these different parts," Keller says. "A dealer is trying to keep a tech on a flat rate to keep them busy, but they never have the part in stock. ... It creates longer lead times."

He adds that an industry-wide thought similar to auto practices might help – such as having the same water fill on all of one manufacturer's units, which helps dealers keep parts in stock.

"I surveyed my own dealers one time with the question: 'How many days does it take on average to get a warranty authorization from your OEM?,' " Keller says. "The best answer was five, the worst was 10. So, if you want to take RECT down – instant warranty authorizations."

The RV world has a different mentality at the OE level compared to marine, which has fewer players with more power. While the same is true of RV, there are more brands/plants under the major OEs.

"If you look at any industrial organization, the higher the barrier to entry is, the higher the barrier to exit. Larger players mean less likely competition, which changes the marketplace dynamics," Keller says. "Marine has a higher barrier to entry/exit than RV."

Regarding dealers, there's much less middle-sized players in marine, he adds.

"Any time a market matures, it forces players to get either big or small," Keller says. "That's just part of natural selection in a more mature market."

### **Direction for Dealers**

RV dealers with an eye on the marine market should be mindful of the industry's segments. The easiest path by far, Keller says, is the pontoon boat market.

"When you go into blue water (like yachts), it's a whole different game. If you're going to be 40 miles offshore, you don't want anything to break. We overbuild for that," he says.

Many RV components are comparatively lower level, Keller says, similar to pontoons.

"If you're an RV dealer thinking about getting into the marine market, get into pontoons – don't try to get into blue water. That market has way different set of circumstances," he adds.

"You'll find a way more inland approach to product in the Keller marine catalog because it crosses with RV."

On the other hand, LNS is a broader marine offering distributor, getting its start in blue water. The company distributes to every market segment across marine and RV.



*“Demographics became very similar (in the RV and marine industries) over the last part of my career compared to the beginning. You can easily see the same person now in both markets ...”*

**– Mike Keller, president, Keller Marine & RV**

“Inland boating is generally smaller vessels – coastal and blue water boating are larger that can be equipped for overnight stays,” Ferleger says. “In addition to the corrosive effects of salt water and its effect on a boat’s operating systems, those boats ... can sustain weekend-plus stays.”

There are different strategies in maintenance, sales and usage between segments, Ferleger adds.

However, for dealers seeking additional revenue streams in the shop, LNS says boats and RVs run with the same plumbing concepts at their cores.

Keller’s advice to dealers: “Take on the right OE product if you’re going to do it. If you’re going to just (retail) crossover accessories, that’s a tough sale.

“But the future of the industry is about accessorizing that new vehicle. Don’t wait for them to stumble back into your dealership later,” he adds.

#### **It’s Showtime!**

While the busy summer season is just around the corner, the marine frenzy takes place during showtime. Keller held its distributor show last November in Hershey, Pa.

“Now we’re trying to ship the frenzy. Our numbers are great, but its not new business – it’s getting business that we already have into the dealer so they’re ready,” Keller says.

He adds the concept of a “dating program” – meaning post-dating invoices – allows dealers to buy now and pay later.

“The concept came because if you’re in Northeast and its 20 below zero, you’re not boating. We knew, as distributors, we want to try and make our production a little even (it never will be even – always be high season versus low season). If we can get a bunch of orders shipped into dealer right now, then when season starts, we have big enough trucks to hold it the rest of the year,” he says.

“Product proliferation helps us, but as distributors, you need to know your function. If you don’t add value to the dealer and its customers, you’re toast.”

LNS also touts the “best shows in the industry.”

“Our virtual and in-person shows this past year exceeded expectations. We were very excited about the opportunity to safely host our first in-person show in Connecticut this past November since the pandemic began,” LNS says.

Land ‘N’ Sea is already planning for its future shows, including a marine and RV dealer event in Las Vegas on Oct. 13-14, plus a show with Kellogg Marine slated for Nov. 17-18 in Connecticut. **RV**

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# Jacks of All Trades

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By Lisa Dicksteen

Starting in the marine industry, manufacturer rep firm Derema Group now encompasses the 'outdoor recreation' space at-large.



**Matt Havlik, Derema sales specialist, leads a Samlex-focused training at an RV dealership. Providing training to marine and RV dealership employees is an important role that Derema Group fulfills.**

**B**y their nature, Derema Group's employees are jacks of all trades, pitching in wherever they are needed, whether at dealerships, at shows, or wherever else their responsibilities take them.

"Everyone in the company does everything," says Derema Group President Kurt Forsman. "It just depends what percentage of their day is dedicated to what."

That includes Forsman, who spent a recent Saturday at an RV dealership setting up endcaps.

By structuring the company to mirror a vendor's direct sales-force, he says Derema is positioned to "implement a vendor's holistic plan across the country. They talk to us once and we roll out across the country at the same time, as if it was them."

## Unique in the Industry

Forsman says Westchester, Pa.-based Derema Group is fairly unique among manufacturer rep firms in that it serves both the RV and marine industries. Among the manufacturers Derema currently represents across North America, seven are crossovers. That is, products sell into both the marine and RV industries. Those crossovers include Lumitec (lighting), Magma (outdoor cooking equipment), Orion (safety equipment), Peterson (DOT lighting), Samlex America (power supply), Star brite (cleaning and maintenance) and WOW (inflatable water toys).

Reflecting its strong presence in the RV market, Derema represents seven products exclusively for the RV market: Cofair Prod-





ucts (self-adhesive weather proofing), Flojet (water and wastewater), Hughes Autoformers (voltage boosters and surge protectors), LaSalle Bristol (aftermarket roofing and sealant), PowerMax (battery charging and converting), RV Designer (replacement hardware) and SnapPad (jack pads).

Derema is unique in other ways as well. Unlike most manufacturer's representatives, the company has never gone out looking for brands to add to its roster, according to Forsman. Instead, the company focuses on expanding the brands it does have into different parts of the country, Forsman says, because "not all our brands are in every market, yet."

Every brand Derema works with requested representation, Forsman says, "because they were looking for a different approach." That difference is expressed in several ways. According to Forsman, the first is a cohesive salesforce.

"Other groups are not really groups. They are a collection of individuals who work together under the same name. They are affiliated but not unified," he says. "Our salesforce is unified. Everyone works for Derema, and everyone works together for the good of the client."

"We also offer a lot of things no one else offers, such as eLert and DeremaHelpRV," he adds. "Our overall approach is different, too. We look at the sales cycle as an actual circle, and we start with the consumer. We're not interested in moving product – we're interested in bringing customers into our dealerships and helping



**Kurt Forsman, president of Derema Group, arranges RV SnapPads on a dealership's shelves during a recent visit. Forsman says he and other Derema team members pitch in whenever and wherever they are needed to assist Derema's marine and RV supplier clients.**





**Derema Sales Specialist Teri Barrett (second from right) takes orders from a dealer on behalf of one of its supplier clients at the Arrow Distributing show. Derema got its start as a manufacturer rep firm serving marine suppliers but expanded in 2018 to include the RV industry.**

our dealers make more sales. To do this, we spend time in each dealership and determine how best to merchandise it based on who their customers are, then we train their staff to sell to those customers. Everything we do is in service to our main goal of supporting our dealers.”

### **RV & Marine Part of Larger Outdoor Rec Industry**

The two industries are merging more and more in the minds of consumers – not because they are the same, but because they both fall under the larger rubric of outdoor recreation.

For that reason, Forsman says, “When we decided to move into RVs, we did not frame the expansion as a move into RVs, per se, but as an expansion farther into ‘outdoors’. People want to get out more – and that’s not necessarily in an RV or a boat. In reality, we are specialists not in ‘RV and marine’ but in ‘outdoor recreation’.”

While there are similarities between the RV and marine industries and their customers, Forsman is quick to note that they are “adjacent rather than the same.” One thing that makes them different is that marine is forensic, while RV is serial numbers.

What does that mean?

Forsman explains that when an RV dealer needs to replace a light, they look up the serial number, find it in inventory or order it from the manufacturer, and install it. However, when a marine dealer needs to replace a bow light, they can’t do that.

“They have to physically examine the light and do forensic research to figure out where it came from and how to get a new

one,” he says. “The two mindsets could not be more different.”

Size is the main reason for the disparity. Forsman estimates that there are about 2,500 RV dealers in the U.S., and franchise laws limit the number of dealers in any one state. At the same time, there are about 9,000 marine dealers in the U.S., and some 300 boat builders in the state of Maine alone.

### **Expansion into RV Market a Natural One**

Having started in 2000 as a national sales and marketing solution for the marine industry, Derema entered the RV market in 2018, after multiple customers and vendors began to diversify and encouraged the company to follow suit, saying, “You guys really need to be in RV,” Forsman says.

In addition, suppliers in each market expressed desire to work with the manufacturer rep firm on launching into the new space.

Once the decision was made to expand to the RV market, there was a certain amount of ramping up to do. Forsman, who was part of the sales team at the time, says, “We knew if we were going to enter this new arena, we had to do it right. We hired specialized RV personnel to complement our existing personnel.”

Those newcomers were integrated into the existing sales force, and today, there is no one in the company who handles only one industry or the other, according to Forsman.

In fact, the company’s 24 outside specialists are divided not by industry, but into sales specialists and dealer specialists. There are nine of the latter, and they spend more than 50 percent of their



time calling on dealers. The other 15 team members spend less than 50 percent of their time at dealerships and the rest working on direct accounts, such as distributors, OEMs and retailers, for programs and strategies designed to drive sales for Derema's brands.

How does all this help dealers?

While it's true that the rep ultimately works for the manufacturer, Forsman says, "Dealers that fully engage with the manufacturers' representative tend to be more successful – especially in the retail store area."

For example, Derema "has tools available to help dealers drive more traffic to their location. And when they express their ideas or concerns, (always easier with a rep you have a relationship with), we can address them in a way that is mutually beneficial," he says. "That may include better signage to explain a product or category. It may be a training event for their staff or consumers. Or it may be discount coupons to better hit a price point and drive sales. All of this is customized to that specific dealer or dealer chain."

It's common knowledge that the more you know, the more you can sell, and Derema has expanded its educational and information resources for that reason, according to Forsman.



**During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, which impacted in-person visits to dealerships, Derema Group made use of a virtual presentation, dubbed SHOWUP, to provide dealership employees with information on the latest product developments from the suppliers the company represents.**

*"Other groups are not really groups. They are a collection of individuals who work together under the same name. They are affiliated but not unified. Our salesforce is unified. Everyone works for Derema, and everyone works together for the good of the client."*

**– Derema Group President Kurt Forsman**



**A staff member at Longview RV Superstores (right) talks with Forsman. Derema team members make frequent visits to dealerships on behalf of the suppliers that Derema represents.**





Forsman works to tidy up a store display in a dealership. Derema Group employs 24 outside specialists, of which nine are dealer specialists and the remaining 15 members are sales specialists who spend much of their time working with direct accounts, including distributors and RV manufacturers.

*“When we decided to move into RVs, we did not frame the expansion as a move into RVs, per se, but as an expansion farther into ‘outdoors’. People want to get out more and that’s not necessarily in an RV or a boat. In reality, we are specialists not in ‘RV and marine’ but in ‘outdoor recreation’.”*

**– Derema Group President  
Kurt Forsman**



Forsman organizes merchandise on a dealership's shelves on a recent visit.

### Offering Tools to Help Partners

Over the past 24 months, Derema has developed and refined tools designed to assist the OEM, installer, dealer, distributor salesman, retail store associate and their vendor brands. Among those assistive technologies are DeremaHelpRV, ShareFile, Maximizer CRM, e-Lerts and more. The underlying theme is providing critical information quickly and accurately.

DeremaHelpRV is an app. It works on Android or Apple smartphones or tablets, and a slightly less functional version works on desktops. On a mobile device, a single click will dial the requested technical assistance. The website [www.deremahelprv.com](http://www.deremahelprv.com) for desktop versions allows users to investigate the overall content and feel are.

“The main idea is to consolidate information that may or may not be available on a vendor’s website into a common easy-to-follow platform, so the user can quickly and seamlessly find information on any of our brands,” Forsman says. “The information included is updated daily to ensure accuracy.”

He adds, “ShareFile and Maximizer CRM are more back-end items that support the market, where you can store all the data. e-Lerts allow us to send that information to a refined list of over 4,000 opt-in RV dealer contacts.”

More products are in development, the company says. In the not-too-distant future, Derema’s Best Brand Rewards LMS will include RV-specific training on Hughes Autoformers, SnapPad, Samlex and others.

### Food for Thought

For RV dealers considering entering the marine market, Forsman says that the skillset is dramatically different. For example, many RV dealers service everything but the motor. At a marine dealership, they fix everything – including motors.

“With an RV, you send powertrain issues to the manufacturer,” he explains. “You fix a boat motor yourself.”

Still, there are dealers who serve customers in both markets well. Forsman says they are successful when they run the two segments as separate entities – “Separate showrooms, separate service departments, even separate entrances. And you have to





A Derema sales specialist tackles merchandising for Star brite's Star Tron-branded Enzyme Fuel Treatment. Derema is notable among manufacturer rep groups in that it represents both marine and RV suppliers, with some products having crossover potential between the two markets.

think a lot about it. It's a commitment. You can't just dabble in marine," he says.

It's essential to know the customers, too.

"Most RVers are in the market for toppers (small boats that can be transported on top of a car or in a small trailer). They are not likely to get into engine parts and manifolds," Forsman says. "The smallest boats, the ones with outboard motors, those are the most sensible for RV dealers."

In the end, dealers really need to talk to an expert before entering the boat market, Forsman says, adding, "If you're thinking of expanding into marine, talk to us. We spend hours each day just having that conversation." **RV**

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# Boomin' in Boise

By Rob Merwin

**Dennis Dillon RV Marine Powersports opens one of the Northwest's largest showrooms in a new facility and rides the wave of RV and marine sales in its region.**

From its early beginnings in the 1970s as GMC Motorhome Center, the family-owned dealership in Boise, Idaho, is now known simply as DDRV. It has since claimed the mantle as the state's largest motorhome dealer that now also includes marine and motorsport offerings.

Not only has it expanded to a southern California location, but it also sports a brand-new Boise facility.

"We just recently opened up a new, beautiful facility – probably the biggest showroom in the Northwest, that houses all of our RV, marine and powersports divisions," says Jeremy Wemhoff, Dennis Dillon RV Marine Powersports' sales manager. He has been with the dealership for 12 years, and first cut his teeth as a marine mechanic.

Owned by the Dillon family – which includes founder Dennis Dillon and his son, Brad, who is now the company president – the new 95,000-square-foot facility also includes 10 service bays and an extensive retail department. An additional eight bays are spread throughout the dealership's 46-acre campus.

That's in comparison to the former facility, which was a converted truck service center with four bays and a small office space. DDRV's powersports division – which had been at a separate location in Boise – is now also included, so all offerings are under one roof.

"The new facility launched in February 2020, which, needless to say, was an interesting time to open," chuckles General Manager/Finance Manager Neal Foster, who has been in the industry for 22 years and with DDRV since 2015.







From left to right: the DDRV team includes Jeremy Wemhoff, sales manager; Darin Wilson, sales; Scott Richards, service; Jerry Mangeac, finance; and Shawn Monahay, service.



Family-owned DDRV has two locations. Pictured here is the Boise site, which offers marine, RV and powersports. The dealership touts having one of the largest showrooms in the Northwest.





**Above and below: Service techs Scott Richards (left) and Shawn Monahay work together on a DDRV boat.**

As difficult as it is to compare sales in the past two years to previous years, in terms of company growth, the times have been unprecedented – as they have been across the industry, according to Wemhoff.

“Month after month, our sales keep surprising us every day,” he says.

Between RV and marine, DDRV would typically carry a total of 500 to 600 units, collectively.

“But that was when we were able to get inventory,” Foster says. “Now, it’s whatever we can get – it doesn’t stay around long enough to count it. They (units) are often sold before they get on the lot.”

Having begun with selling RVs only, marine offerings followed when they began to become more available in DDRV’s Boise area, which features several lakes and reservoirs within an hour’s drive, Wemhoff says.

“We filled a need and also filled a hole in our dealership,” he says. “We’re fortunate to have come across good product lines that haven’t been taken – it was a good decision for us.”

About 35 percent of DDRV’s customers own both RVs and marine products, with the majority of customers being marine enthusiasts first.

“In this marketplace, marine dealers are fairly small, whereas RV dealers are a lot bigger,” Foster says. “Our marine market is





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Sales Manager Jeremy Wenhoff (left) and General Manager Neal Foster stand outside of DDRV's location in Boise.

limited here, because tow boats are definitely pricey, beginning around \$100,000, and pontoon boats starting at \$40,000.

“Our marine products are high-end,” he adds. “We offer the full spectrum of financing for our customers and we maximize it – it’s a strong profit center.”

For a dealership that specializes in RV, marine and powersports, DDRV has a broad range of potential manufacturer partners. So, how does it decide which ones to include?

The answer is simple, according to Foster.

“It really comes down to working relationships, first and foremost, from top to bottom,” he says. “It comes down to myself, Jeremy and our inventory manager talking to their reps and their service people. You need a good relationship with your manufacturers in order to take care of your customers.”

“There aren’t nearly as many boat manufacturers as there for RVs,” Wenhoff points out, “so finding the right product for the right market is of utmost importance.”

As is the right staff, Foster adds.

“The typical RV store that decides they’re going to carry boats in the showroom tomorrow won’t have any success, because they likely won’t have the knowledgeable people and support for them,” he says.

For marine manufacturers, DDRV carries Forest River’s Trifecta line of pontoon boats, surf/tow boats from Centurion, Supreme and Sanger, as well as personal watercrafts from Sea-Doo. Additional motorsports products also are available.

“The Centurions are the ‘cream of the crop’ in the tow boat world,” Foster says, with Wenhoff adding, “From GPS electronics down to cruise control, they basically do everything for you.”

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**Shawn Monahay, who works in service, is an important part of the DDRV team. Despite being a big facility, the dealership claims its culture still feels like a mom-and-pop, hometown business.**



RV manufacturers and offerings, however, outpace those of DDRV's marine products, as well as in sales.

"We carry a bundle: Forest River, Highland Ridge, Winnebago, Roadtrek, Lance, Outdoor RV, Nexus, REV, Fleetwood among others," Wemhoff says. "We carry the full gamut – from entry-level trailers to high-end diesel pushers."

"We're also trending toward an emphasis on Super C motorhomes as the market moves that way," Foster adds. "Everybody in this neck of the woods wants to tow something and have heavy-towing capacity. Many RVers in the Northwest like heavy toys, which are also part of the menu here at DDRV. They also tow horse trailers and race trailers."

As demand remains far greater than supply and shortages continue at the manufacturing level, Foster foresees those trends continuing.

"They won't catch up for a long time, so demand will overwhelm supply into the future," he says.

### **Decisive Company Culture**

In addition to a broad range of offerings, a new facility and strong manufacturer relationships, DDRV also prides itself on its company culture and its employees, which fluctuates around 70, depending on the season.

"We're fast-moving and decisive because we have local ownership that's always available for us," Foster explains. "We don't have to take ideas to a board – we can make changes and decisions rapidly. And despite being a big facility, our culture still feels like a mom-and-pop, hometown business."

"Any successful dealership is based on good processes and making tweaks to those processes quickly to move forward is important – from bringing on a new manufacturer to transitioning an employee to another department."

"Most of our employees were born and raised here (Foster and Wemhoff both consider themselves 'local guys') with a high percentage of our staff being native to the area. They have pride in where they work."



**Nicole Hulbert covers DDRV's administrative and receptionist needs at the Boise site.**





**DDRV's Boise facility sports 95,000 square feet on a 46-acre campus. In addition, the dealership has a California store.**

Most employees are long-term and there's very little turnover, according to Wemhoff.

"Most of that is because of management and how everyone treats each other," he says. "Whether it's the owner talking to a salesperson and so on and so forth – there's great communication throughout the dealership."

Does DDRV have company meetings where staff can pipe up if they want to?

Foster emphatically says no – there's no need.

"Our doors are always open, and if there's an issue, we listen and address it," he says. "There are no closed-door meetings around here and there are no secrets. Everyone feels involved, instead of just taking marching orders. People stay because they like it."

### Service as a Profit Center

When making a sale on a unit, DDRV's 18 service bays are a "great selling feature" and profit center, according to Wemhoff.

"When we're selling an RV to a prospective customer, we can tell them we have a great service facility and we can get them in and out quickly," he says. "It's important to have that."

Each bay is equipped with at least one tech, sometimes two, as DDRV's senior technicians will often have an apprentice working

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Darin Wilson, who works in sales, is pictured by a selection of DDRV's boats and RVs.



Scott Richards, who works in DDRV service, carries out his day-to-day work. The dealership touts 18 service bays as a profit center.

alongside them as well. Word of mouth is the dealership's strongest hand in getting new techs on-board, and while some new hires have little or no experience, it can have its benefits.

"It's good and bad, because you don't want to bring in any bad habits," he adds, "but we can teach them the right way. We can grow our own."

Both men stress that they also maximize all of the training offered by manufacturers.

"It starts with our manufacturers and talking with the reps," Wemhoff explains. "Any information that we can possibly get, we absorb as much as possible."

Foster credits the benefits of the dealership being family-operated and locally owned, saying, "If Jeremy and I want to try something, we can quickly run it up the ladder and we usually get the blessing to do it pretty quickly. If something works great, then we adopt it as a process. If not, we move on. We don't have to worry about a national corporation telling us how we're going to do things, and that extends to training."

### Retail with Abundance of Display Space

DDRV's retail department has about 10,000 square feet of display area and an abundance of over-the-counter retail offerings, as well as a "giant" parts department that's housed between service, Foster says, though he adds, "We normally have a lot of parts, but the pandemic has changed how much we can get and stock."

From summertime products to jackets and boots for colder seasons, DDRV's accessories and parts employees are often chal-



*“As difficult as it is to compare sales in the past two years to previous years, in terms of company growth, the times have been unprecedented – as they have been across the industry.”*

**– Jeremy Wemhoff, Dennis Dillon RV Marine Powersports’ sales manager**

lenged with rotating seasonal offerings and retail presentations at least twice a year to cater to different clientele.

To assist toward that end, DDRV’s suppliers provide end-caps and promotional items throughout the year depending on the season.

“Because we offer RV, marine and powersport products, the list of our suppliers is as long as your arm,” Foster says.

#### **Expansion into Southern California**

DDRV also launched a second, RV-only location seven years ago in Westminster, Calif., to serve buyers who were traveling to its Boise location for RVs.

“We wanted to expand our business, and as we were doing a lot of sales in Boise, we discovered that many people were coming up from the Southern California area to buy,” Wemhoff explains. “We were able to locate an old car dealership and turn it into one of the nicest RV dealerships down there.”

Opening a dealership in California had its challenges.

“It’s difficult to do business in, period. And frankly, it’s difficult to open anything anywhere, because you have to consider what products are in that area and which ones are available for you,” Wemhoff says. “We couldn’t have opened another one here in Boise because there wouldn’t have been a single unit to put on a new lot.

“We try to mirror what we have here in Boise in Westminster, but in some cases our products are already in existing dealerships, but we do a good job at it, and we can transfer product where we can,” he adds.

Having good systems and processes in place that can be replicated at a new location is of paramount importance, according to Wemhoff.

“When we opened up, we went down there and helped the new team and taught them, so they were on the same page as the Idaho location,” he says.

Staffing also can commonly be challenging, but DDRV was fortunate that another Westminster RV dealership had recently closed, so DDRV could obtain some of the store’s past employees.

“Nearly everybody at our dealerships are enthusiasts in their divisions,” Foster says, and both men say they have a passion for what they sell, which is the main thing.

“While we have a family atmosphere, we’re also professionals who take pride in what we do. And we have a wonderful facility we get to walk into every day,” Foster adds. “There’s pride in where you hang your hat.” **RV2**



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# Power Solutions for Land or Sea

By K. Schipper

**Samlex America is known to many in the RV market for its solar power panels and kits, but the company offers a wide range of power solutions to the marine industry as well.**

**OEM**s and dealers in the RV industry recognize the name of Samlex America as serving “land yachts,” but the company also has a robust business selling to real yachts as well.

The company has been supplying power solutions to RVs for much of its 31-year history. The same can be said for the marine market. However, it’s only within the past decade that the company has really beefed up its presence – and its products – for water adventurers.

Jonathan Krawchuk, the company’s channel account manager for the RV and marine markets, says not only are there a lot of similarities between the two, but in a lot of places RV dealers are also selling boats, plus, “It’s an exciting market,” he says.

There are some differences, though. Not only do a lot of products used by mariners need to be more durable to deal with a tougher environment and more demanding standards, but there’s a commercial side to boating that ties back to Samlex’s origins in the wireless telecommunications and mobile fleet markets.

## Marine Market Requires ‘Robustness in Products’

It’s probably a testament to the quality of Samlex’s power products that people in both the marine and RV industries were originally buying them through channels not set up for either market. With the organic growth of both markets, it also made sense for the company to put more effort into them, according to Krawchuk.

“Our products have been sold in a lot of different markets,” he says. “We were focusing on the RV market for a longer period than we were the marine market. It’s really been within the last 10 years that we started focusing on the marine market, with established distribution channels and marine-specific literature.”

Krawchuk adds that not only is recreation a large and interesting market, but many RV owners also have boats, and there are dealers who sell both.

“We found there were a lot of people who are RVers who found one of our inverters or a solar system was useful, and they realized it was something they could use on their boats as well,” he says.



Samlex America executive team enjoys a moment of levity during a recent meeting at the company’s offices in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada. Pictured from left to right are: Mike Berg (industry manager), Cody Berg (industry manager), Mike Hamanishi (president), Christie Kellogg (marketing manager) and Shawn Dahya (director of sales).

Earl Berg (pictured at right) founded Samlex in his garage in 1991. Today, the company is a leading manufacturer of power conversion products with a presence in more than 90 companies.







**Jonathan Krawchuk, Samlex channel account manager for the RV and marine markets, highlights the Dealer Success Binder, which simplifies power and solar requirements in RVs and boats and helps dealers determine their customer's mobile power needs.**

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAMLEX AMERICA

Not only that, but the needs of the recreational customers in both markets are similar – although not identical.

“They both want to power the same things,” Krawchuk says. “It may be a microwave to heat up dinner or a coffeemaker, or an entertainment system. Or they may want to charge up some batteries in a camera.”

At the same time, he says the markets work in much the same way. That means having distributors who sell to dealers who then retail boats and aftermarket products.

Perhaps where the two markets diverge is in the need for what Krawchuk refers to as “robustness in products” in the marine market. He explains that while having a product on an RV fail somewhere out in the boondocks can be a problem, if that occurs in the middle of a lake or out in the ocean, the situation might be dire.

“They want to make sure that something’s going to work well for them, and that the installation is done to the highest standard,” Krawchuk says. “It’s going to do more than ruin your day – especially when we look at commercial fisheries where boats are being used for work.”

### **RV & Marine Markets Similar ... But Different**

That’s a big reason behind Samlex’s move to have most of its marine products certified for electrical safety by Intertek’s ETL (Electrical Testing Laboratories), as well as supplemental certification for the marine market. The company also has certifications for its inverter/charger series from the American Boat and Yacht Council (ABYC).

“People look to see if it’s a marinized product,” Krawchuk says. “For example, with our inverter/chargers, the circuit boards have

*“We found there were a lot of people who are RVers who found one of our inverters or a solar system was useful, and they realized it was something they could use on their boats as well.”*

**– Jonathan Krawchuk, Samlex channel account manager for the RV and marine markets**



**Francis Natividad, a technical specialist at Samlex, programs an EVO inverter/charger for a lithium battery using the Samlex EVO RC Plus remote control.**





**Samlex America is buzzing with activity these days, thanks in part to the robust demand for boats and RVs.**

*“We’re going to see more boats with solar panels on them; we’re going to see inverters coming standard on a lot more boats over the next few years; and we’re probably going to see lithium batteries become more popular. We’re already seeing that in the RV industry and the boating industry is happening the same way.”*

**– Jonathan Krawchuk, Samlex channel account manager for the RV and marine markets**



**Samlex is equally at home providing products to the RV and marine markets. Pictured here is one of the company’s EVO inverter/charger installed on a boat named Seapiper.**

a certain coating on them, so the salt air doesn’t corrode them as quickly.”

Installation isn’t quite the same, either. He says installers know that inverters and inverter/chargers must be installed where they’re not going to be splashed by water, which often means a sealed compartment.

Having those inverter/chargers certified is important because of the importance of inverters to the marine industry. However, it also points to a couple other differences between that market and RVs. While inverters are big in both markets, in the marine industry it’s almost exclusively pure sine, and often marine customers are running more 24-volt equipment than the average RV.

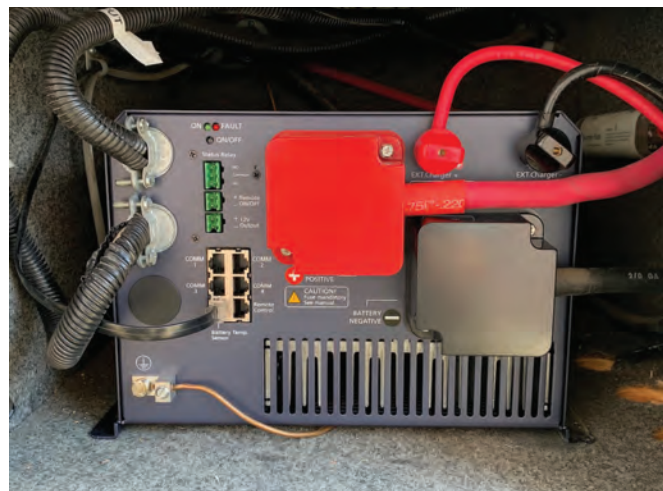
By comparison, Krawchuk says the company sells almost no 24-volt equipment to the RV industry.

“The needs of the recreational customer are quite similar in both markets,” he says. “However, in commercial boats, there are things they need to be powering. For instance, we’ve run into people needing to power RFID (radio frequency identification) scanners to tag their catch. It’s also common for them to run power tools and heavy-duty equipment.”

There also is something of a different approach to powering devices on a boat versus an RV. Someone boondocking in their RV may rely on a solar system and battery power. However, the average boater has that engine under power a great deal of the time charging batteries.

“Of course, if you’re in a sailboat, it’s a little bit different,” Krawchuk observes. “But, if you’re looking at a boat with an engine, people will have an inverter and a battery system because they don’t want to have to burn all their gasoline.”

One popular use, he says, is to power a small air conditioner, so the engine doesn’t have to run at night. And, yes, there are



**The Samlex America Evolution F Series EVO-1212F Inverter/Charger is a 1,200-watt pure sine wave inverter with 60-amp adaptive battery charger and 30-amp transfer relay – all in one unit. This heavy-duty inverter/charger is designed to provide reliable AC power wherever it’s needed, including boats, RVs, cabins and specialty vehicles.**





Samlex inverters undergo testing prior to being shipped to dealers.

boat owners – primarily sailboats and pontoons – that install solar systems on their craft.

“The sail-boating crowd is the bulk of it,” Krawchuk says. “With those boats, there’s a pretty good amount of real estate on the deck for solar panels, and they want to be able to crank the stereo and keep those batteries charged. Some people just have a small solar system on them they use either when they’re sitting at the dock or if they’re moored somewhere just to keep the charge in their batteries.”

### Samlex Offers Service & Support

As with the RV industry, Samlex’s marine customers are a mix of new boat buyers and those who are upgrading an existing setup. Krawchuk says there really is no bad time to install a power system or an inverter or even upgrade to solar.

Most of the work is done at the dealer level.

“Probably the best time is when a person is buying the boat initially,” Krawchuk says. “If you’re buying from a dealer a lot of the dealers will do the work for the customer. However, you can always add on as an aftermarket thing.”

Unlike the RV industry, however, Samlex also works with some of the boat builders, especially when it comes to installing inverters.

“We take a look at what the needs of their customers are, what types of markets they serve and whether they’re building a big boat or a smaller boat,” he says. “A lot of these builders are different than the RV manufacturers, just because when you’re getting a boat built there’s a lot more room for customization with the factory. For instance, they’ll build a custom installation for the inverter for each boat that they’re doing.”



Samlex offers a wide array of power products, including battery chargers, transfer switches, AC-DC supplies, as well as inverters and solar power panels (pictured).





**Gray Ghost Restorations in British Columbia, Canada, did a renovation of an Airstream trailer that included installing solar power panels and a Samlex EVO-2212 inverter/charger, plus an EVO-RC-PLUS remote in the coach. Gray Ghost is a strong believer in Samlex products. (Photos courtesy of Marc Terrien of Thin Air Web)**

Although that may be different, much of the rest of Samlex's work with the marine industry closely mirrors its work with RVs. Both markets are served by the manufacturer's rep firm Derema Group.

"They support our dealers in terms of rolling out new products and helping with displaying the product, answering questions and supporting us at shows," Krawchuk says. "They're all about supporting that dealer network and they work closely with our distribution channel to make sure the dealers are able to get our product and get it on-time."

Of course, with COVID-19 and current supply chain issues, that's proving to be more of a challenge these days, especially since Samlex sources components from all over the world.

"The last two years have been a really different ballgame for everybody," Krawchuk says. "We've had to adapt a lot of things, but I think it's improving. And, because we're in several different markets besides RV and marine, we're able to have higher stocking levels in all those markets, which is to our benefit."

The other area where the two markets closely mirror each other is with Samlex's use of its "Dealer Success Binder," which – as RV dealers know – allows whoever is talking to a particular customer to be able to effectively size out a system that best meets that customer's needs.

"Of course, we have marine-specific marketing literature and marine-specific catalogs," he says. "That way we're sure to feature





Among the many markets that Samlex serves are communications, mobile fleet, fixed off-grid, OEM and off-road.

applications that are specific to the marine industry. So, it's the same but different."

And, as with the RV industry, the company also supports that with a calculator on its website that also walks a dealer or customer through the system. The same information also is available through customer service at Samlex's toll-free phone number.

Nor does service stop with the sale. Krawchuk says owners of Samlex products who are having problems can have them resolved through dealers, marinas or even boat supply stores.

While the company offers at a minimum a two-year warranty on its products, one of the advantages with its inverters is a diagnostic feature on them.

"A customer can put a memory card in it, and then email the file to our tech team," Krawchuk says. "We can take a look at it remotely and it avoids having people trying to troubleshoot these things or shipping them back to where they bought it."

Regardless of what its marine customers are looking for, Krawchuk says he's confident that segment of Samlex's customer base will continue to grow.

"We're going to see more boats with solar panels on them; we're going to see inverters coming standard on a lot more boats over the next few years; and we're probably going to see lithium batteries become more popular," he says. "We're already seeing that in the RV industry and the boating industry is happening the same way." **RVP**

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# Star brite

FT. LAUDERDALE, FL

## A 'Brite' Future

By Darian Armer

**When it comes to Star brite, selling one automotive product can lead to a successful business serving multiple markets – and even garner the support of the Miami Dolphins' cheerleaders.**



Yogi – who belongs to Greg Dornau, executive vice president of sales and marketing, and Peter Dornau, Star brite founder and CEO – attends a show with the Star brite team. Star brite is a proudly dog-friendly company.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STAR BRITE

It's been a busy 50 years for Star brite – which celebrates five decades in business next year – and things have only gotten busier for the marine and RV supplier in recent years.

The company, which makes waxes, polishes, and other cleaning products, started out in 1973 with one automotive product: Star brite Auto Polish. Star brite capitalized on its marketing efforts at the time to create memorable and well-known Star brite commercials, including the “Junkyard Test” and the Star brite cheerleaders.

The “Junkyard Test” commercial featured an automobile selected from a junk yard and transformed into a vehicle of beauty in minutes, utilizing Star brite Polish. This led to the development of an expanded lineup of products for auto appearance and maintenance. The Miami Dolphins' cheerleaders became the “Star brites” as part of the promotion in 1981, where they helped promote a store opening, special sales and other events.

It was during this growth in the mid-1980s that Star brite began shifting its product focus to the marine industry. What followed was a lineup of boat care and appearance products.

Since then, Star brite has expanded beyond marine and automotive into the RV industry, aircraft, home care, aviation, outdoor power equipment, powersports and motorcycle markets.

Today, Star brite's corporate offices are located in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., where it employs 50 people. The main production facility is in Montgomery, Ala., where the company manufactures all of the molding of bottles, water and oil-based products, as well as distribution, research and development. The company employs more than 150 people at the production facility in Alabama.



## Entering the RV Industry

When it comes to the RV industry, Star brite initially got into the business 20 years ago – and fairly quickly got out of it.

“There were a lot of synergies between the marine and RV industries back then. The fiberglass is the same on a boat as an RV. There were and are a lot of synergies between the auto, marine and RV marketplace. They found it was a profitable opportunity for them,” says Eric Hahn, director of sales and marketing. “They got out because so many competitors had entered the marketplace with watered-down formulas they sold for cheap.”

Star brite re-entered the RV industry in 2016, when Hahn says the company felt an increase in demand from the consumer for a quality product.

“There wasn’t suddenly a huge shrink in the number of competitors,” says Hahn. “We felt the need to enter back in with a product that wasn’t the lowest or highest price point, but a really quality product at a quality price.”

The company says it targets the outdoorsman, and all the many outdoor vehicles and boats they might use.

“With the RV industry, we’re essentially appealing to the outdoor enthusiast. Someone who wants to take in adventure, get outside and see something different,” says Hahn. “Whether it’s a hunter, fisherman, camper, RVer or boater, in our minds they all do fall into a similar category. We’re really speaking to that



*“The marine and RV industry have done phenomenally well. What better way to socially distance and get out of the house than in a RV or boat? We’ve seen some really unprecedented growth.”*

**– Eric Hahn, Star brite  
director of sales and marketing**



**At Star brite, every phone call is answered by a real person. The company’s sales team doubles as the customer service team. Pictured from left to right are: June Strasser; Ryan Grubbs, inside sales representative; Erik Applegate, director of sales and marketing; Eric Hahn, director of sales and marketing; Turner Burwick; and Derick Cote, key account manager.**





**A Star brite boat gets a scrub. The company's boat care offerings include cleaners, mold control, polishes and waxes, plus care products for metal, plastic, vinyl and teakwood.**



**Labels for Star brite's Mildew Stain Remover, which cleans vinyl seats, cushions and covers, are ready to adhere to bottles on the production line.**



class of customer. It makes sense, especially for RV and marine dealerships that have a lot of crossover and who are targeting the same customer. A lot of customers have both a boat and a RV."

Hahn says the company knows that its products aren't used for the necessarily fun parts of RVing.

"Our products are designed to be fast and effective. We know cleaning and maintaining your RV is not the most enjoyable part of owning an RV, so we give them a product that works fast and easy and has a long-lasting effect," says Hahn.

Star brite has about 960 active SKUs throughout all its channels. Many products have a lot of crossover between industries and can be used in multiple markets. Hahn says the highest volume products for the RV market are mildew stain remover, rubber roof cleaner and protectant, and their new boiler system anti-freeze for heat-exchange systems and radiant heat.

Star brite only uses distributors to sell its product. Hahn says they use every major distributor to help get their products onto dealer's shelves.

### **COVID-19 Ups the Ante**

Just like many other companies that serve the outdoor industry, Star brite saw a large boom in demand for its products following the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The marine and RV industry have done phenomenally well. What better way to socially distance and get out of the house than in a RV or boat? We've seen some really unprecedented growth," says Hahn.



With the onslaught of new customers to both industries, Hahn says there's a need for education for new customers.

"Our big marketing message we're pushing to dealers is that they need to educate their customers. The customer has bought this new \$20,000 to \$200,000 RV or boat, and now they need to maintain it properly, protect it from the roads, salt and weather. We need dealers to be telling customers, 'You've made a new investment, now make sure you protect your investment.' We want to get customers hooked on a good maintenance regimen," says Hahn.

"From the dealership side, that's something else to sell to the consumer. You just sold a RV or boat – you want that customer coming back into the shop to not only buy big things or when something is broken, but to buy something every time they walk through the door. Engine fuels or antifreeze for winterization. There's something in the Star brite lineup for the customer, every time. It's a must have to build that repeat customer business."

One way Star brite plans to help do this is to provide resources for dealers and their customers.



**Chemical tanks located at Star brite's manufacturing facility in Montgomery, Ala., store product before its packaged.**

*"Our products are designed to be fast and effective. We know cleaning and maintaining your RV is not the most enjoyable part of owning an RV, so we give them a product that works fast and easy and has a long-lasting effect."*

**– Eric Hahn, Star brite  
director of sales and marketing**



**Eric Hahn, the company's director of sales and marketing, talks with attendees about Star brite's products at a distributor show.**





Patrick Pierce (pictured in truck) is a BASS pro fisherman sponsored by Star brite's Star Tron brand. Pierce is pictured here with his Triton boat in tow.



Kinpak - a sister company of Star brite - is a vertical manufacturer that blends both water- and oil-based products for the marine, RV, auto and home care markets.



## Resources for Dealers

Kouri Carey, director of product, marketing and media for Star brite, says the company came back to the RV industry with a smaller, more focused lineup of products.

"We brought all our black streak removers, washes and waxes, but we brought a lot of unique items as well, things like our magic erasers," he says. "We also brought air care products. Our No Damp product draws moisture out of the atmosphere in the RV, so it doesn't develop mold. It's a type of gas that fills the RV or boat and prevents mold from growing in the first place. We also have an all-natural lineup of RV care that uses tea tree oils."

Carey says they are in the process of reinventing their brand, including updating an outdated website.

"We have a very outdated website and that's becoming a pain point. Instead of just upgrading to whatever is now available, we're trying to think a step ahead to what our customers are going to want," Carey says. "With so many new people coming into the RV, marine, UTV and ATV industries, we want to be a source for maintenance questions that come through our website, social or search. We want people to be able to find the right product for their circumstance, whether by surface, by stain or by project. We're taking the customer focus and putting it front and center."

The website is still in development currently, but Carey says the company also plans to have information that is project-oriented by what the products can help a customer do and where to buy them.

"For us, it's all about penetrating the RV market and letting dealers know Star brite is back in the market with unique product offerings, rebate programs and a constant drive for innovation," says Hahn. "We're constantly looking for faster ways to clean, maintain and protect your RVs with less effort. The ultimate goal is for





people to enjoy using their RVs more and maintaining them less.”

Another large part of Starbrite’s efforts to support the industries its products are in is through creating awareness around the industries it serves. Starbrite sponsors eight TV shows on prime-time television and the Discovery Channel. There are even some slated to air on ESPN this year. Starbrite is a title sponsor for the new show, ‘RV There Yet?’ out on Discovery. It follows a group’s RVing adventures throughout national parks.

“We’ll also feature ‘Starbrite Adventures,’ on our website and social media. They’ll be little snippets and series of real trips that real people are making. Sometimes the trip is even just a backyard adventure. It’s the chance to watch our pros or normal Joes do what they’re doing. We tag our products you need along the way. It’s not completely product-focused, though,” says Carey.

“We want to keep people engaged in that lifestyle. We see people come back to the dock after a day of fishing, sharing stories, almost like campfire stories. On the RV side, it does become a campfire story, usually over a bucket of suds. A big component of our social media is to be as entertaining as we are informative.”

Carey says Starbrite is not just building followers – it’s engaging real people and creating forums for those people to share.

“Something that’s really important for our dealer network to know is that the reason we create all these marketing pieces for web and social is so we can share all that with our dealers,” he says. “As we create our library of content, we’ll make it accessible so dealers can use it. All the product assets, Q&As, Adventure Series content, product endorsements and other resources will be available to them for use in their dealerships and to enhance their social media presence.” **RV2**

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SPECIAL PRODUCT FOCUS:

# Marine Accessories

Life on the water is a dream for many, but no voyage can fully embark without the necessary products that make boating more efficient and enjoyable. This month's special section features various marine product offerings, ranging from Bimini tops and waterproof speakers to power sources and marine-grade cleaners.

For more information on the products in this section, type the website address that appears below a respective product listing into your browser. Viewers of the magazine's digital version can click on any listing and be taken directly to the respective company's website.

## MILDEW STAIN REMOVER

**Star brite**, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., offers its Mildew Stain Remover that quickly removes unsightly mold and mildew stains from fiberglass, vinyl, plastic, wood, concrete, tile and more. It begins working on contact. The buffered bleach formula will not harm vinyl upholstery or threads. Designed for tough marine environments, its mold and mildew stain-busting power can be safely used inside and outside boats and RVs.

[www.starbrite.com/](http://www.starbrite.com/)



## BOAT SPEAKER

**ASA Electronics**, Elkhart, Ind., presents its Polk Speaker UMS66SR. The Polk Ultramarine is stylish, high-performance audio that takes boating to the next level. This Polk 6.6" speaker looks sharp and sleek with its rich Smoke color and low-profile trim.

[www.polkmarine.com/](http://www.polkmarine.com/)







## PORTABLE GRILL

**Camco Manufacturing**, Greensboro, N.C., offers its Kuuma Stow N Go 160 Gas Grill. This grill is ideal for boating, RVing, tailgating and patios/decks. It is easy to transport and mounts to any Kuuma rail, rod or pedestal. Works with 1-pound throwaway propane cylinders. Features a large cooking area of 160 square inches. High-quality, lightweight 304 stainless steel increases flavor while minimizing flare-ups. The stainless-steel burner heats up fast, is easy to clean and resists rust. Integrated folding legs are perfect for tabletop use and the grill is easy to assemble.

[www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)

## INVERTER/CHARGER

**Samlex America**, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, presents its 3-in-1 marine power solution. The Evolution Series Inverter/Charger provides reliable household power when off-grid or off-shore, and with its three-times surge capacity, it powers high-surge items like microwaves. It also is compatible with lead-acid and lithium batteries and meets ABYC marine electrical standards. For those who spend time on the water, whether it is work or play, the EVO Series provides the peace of mind of clean, efficient access to power – no matter how far off-shore boaters go.

<https://samlexamerica.com/industries/marine/>



## TEAK OIL & SEALER

**BoatLIFE**, a division of **Life Industries Corp.**, North Charleston, S.C., offers its Teak Brite oil and sealer. The most advanced teak oil and sealer available will deliver long-lasting protection, even in tropical climates. It penetrates deep into cleaned and dry wood to feed and protect finish. It will help preserve teak wood for years to come. Available in Natural and Golden hues, and in quarts, gallons and bulk sizes.

[www.boatlife.com](http://www.boatlife.com)

## REVERSE POLARITY INDICATOR

**SmartPlug Systems**, Seattle, presents its Reverse Polarity Indicator Light System. Reverse polarity is a safety concern that can damage electrical components on a vessel. On the top of all the SmartPlug coach-side

power cord connectors are two LED Indicator Lights. When the SmartPlug is connected to a power source, the lights will illuminate to indicate the status of a safe or unsafe condition. Smartplug's cord sets are weatherproof and easy to use, plus they ensure families can safely enjoy their next adventure.

[www.smartplug.com](http://www.smartplug.com)







### MULTI-PURPOSE WASH BRUSH

**Easy Reach Supply**, Hattiesburg, Miss., offers its Multi-Purpose Wash Brush. The unique, oval-shaped brush is ideal for multiple cleaning applications. The flagged green Nyltex Bristles increase soap and water retention and are ideally suited for all surfaces including painted, gel coat and polished aluminum. The three-hole block allows brush use at multiple angles, making it an all-in-one brush. Easy Reach Supply brushes are proudly made in the U.S.A.

<https://easyreachinc.com/?product=196>



### WATER PURIFIER

**Acuva Technologies**, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, offers its most popular water purifier for boats – the ArrowMAX 2.0, eliminating up to 99.9999 percent of bacteria and viruses to provide safe drinking water straight out of the tap. Included with an advanced pre-filter, the unit will also remove lead, heavy metals, chlorine, mercury, carcinogens and other contaminants, as well as turbidity and unpleasant odors and tastes. Boaters will never have to worry about the quality of their water ever again – no matter where they fill their tanks.

[www.acuvatech.com](http://www.acuvatech.com)



### BLACK HOLDING TANK TREATMENT

**Walex Products**, Wilmington, N.C., offers its Porta-Pak black holding tank treatment that keeps your travels “Odor-Free on land or sea.” With Porta-Pak, Walex was the first company to introduce a portion-controlled, water-soluble sachet into the portable toilet and RV industries. Since its introduction, Porta-Pak has remained the No. 1 holding tank treatment worldwide within multiple industries. Its proprietary formula eliminates odor-causing bacteria working in temperatures above 100 degrees. It’s offered in two refreshing fragrances: Fresh and Lavender Breeze.

[www.walex.com/product/porta-pak-2/](http://www.walex.com/product/porta-pak-2/)

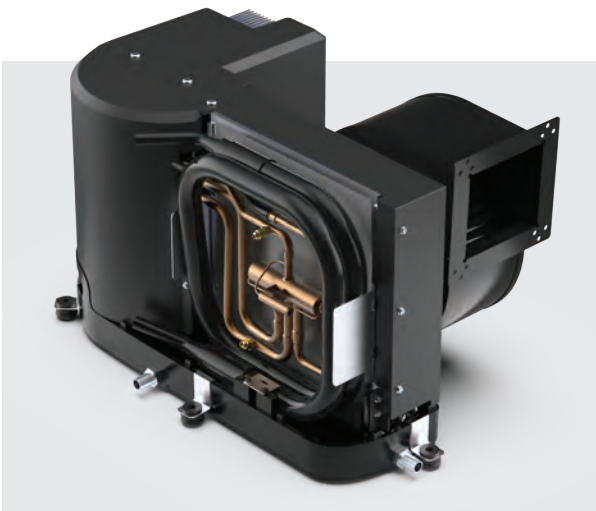


### BOAT CARE PRODUCTS

**Boat Bling**, Phoenix, Ariz., offers its Bling Sauce care products. Bling Sauce was founded in 2004 by two avid boaters and friends with the goal of bringing premium, innovative products to the boating market. As the Bling Sauce name became synonymous with boating, Bling Sauce decided to expand its world-class care products to additional industry segments including RVs, UTVs, automotive and aviation. Today, Bling Sauce is distributed globally across 10 countries and is sold at more than 6,000 retail outlets including Walmart, Bass Pro, Academy Sports, Camping World and more.

[www.blingsauce.com](http://www.blingsauce.com)





## MARINE AIR CONDITIONER

**Dometic Marine**, Litchfield, Ill., presents its Voyager Series TX Marine A/C. The product features innovative variable capacity design that regulates compressor speed based on the cooling or heating demands of the vessel. The new series targets smaller vessels with self-contained DX cooling technology. The variable capacity feature ensures that vessel occupants enjoy enhanced comfort and quieter operation, along with reduced energy costs and greater system durability. A special Sleep Mode allows for quiet and uninterrupted sleep when onboard.

[www.dometic.com](http://www.dometic.com)



## WIRELESS PHONE CHARGER

**Scanstrut**, Westbrook, Conn., introduces the Scanstrut ROKK Wireless Nest, designed to safely house and wirelessly charge cellphones. Now, users can keep their phone in a safe place onboard, tucked away, charged, and ready to go. This is the world's first 12/24V waterproof wireless charge system, ready for life on the go. Perfect for integration into seating, cabinetry, the grippy mat stops phones from sliding. The front lip, with an easy access thumb bevel, acts as a safety barrier, making sure your phone stays in the Nest.

[www.scanstrut.com/vanlife](http://www.scanstrut.com/vanlife)

## DRY HOLDING TANK TREATMENT

**Valterra Products**, Mission Hills, Calif., offers its Odorlos Dry Holding Tank Treatment – a non-toxic, biodegradable treatment that prevents odors and clogs by breaking down waste in black water and gray water tanks. Scent-free formula eliminates odors instead of masking them. Formaldehyde-free, nitrate formula breaks down tissue and waste quickly and easily. Each 6-pound tub contains 24 treatments (1 ounce per every 10 gallons) and a 2-ounce scooper. It is safe and effective in all RV and marine holding tank and septic tank systems and remains effective in extreme temperatures.



[www.valterra.com](http://www.valterra.com)

## CARBON MONOXIDE ALARM

**MTI Industries**, Destin, Fla., presents its battery-operated

CO alarm. The Safe-T-Alert Battery Operated RV Carbon Monoxide Alarm, model SA-340, includes a sealed-in lithium battery – no replacement needed. This alarm conforms to ANSI/UL STD 2034 and meets RVIA/NFPA



requirements. The SA-340 has a full five-year service life and built-in test/hush functions. Easy installation.

[www.mtiindustries.com/](http://www.mtiindustries.com/)

## MACERATING TOILET

**Thetford**, Ann Arbor, Mich., offers its TECMA Silence Plus 2G – a ceramic macerating toilet that offers the largest bowl in the TECMA line. It has a powerful, quiet and fast-flushing macerator pump capable of pushing 36' vertically and 295' horizontally. It comes in both high and low profiles, with a SloClose wood resin seat, cover and stainless-steel hinges. All these great features make the TECMA Silence Plus 2G a highly effective and comfortable choice for yachts and powerboats.

[www.thetfordmarine.com/us/](http://www.thetfordmarine.com/us/)







## FIBERGLASS CLEANER

**Bio-Kleen Products**, Kalamazoo, Mich., presents its fiberglass cleaner to remove chalking, algae, rust, scale, lime, brown waterline stains and oxidation from boats. It is also great for removing chalking, oxidation and yellow stains from an RV fiberglass exterior. It easily removes mineral deposits on outdrives, thru-hall boat exhaust and cleaning pontoon tubes. It's also great for deep cleaning aluminum. A clinging spray-on gel that sticks, increasing surface penetration and dwell time.

[www.biokleen.com](http://www.biokleen.com)



## MARINE & RV WASHDOWN PUMPS

**Xylem**, Beverly, Mass., presents the Jabsco Hot Shot Washdown Pump. The company says it offers the widest and most powerful lineup of marine and RV water and washdown pumps. Ranging from 3 gallons to 6 gallons per minute, these pumps are powerful and long lasting.

[www.xylem.com](http://www.xylem.com)



## SHRINK WRAP

**Dr. Shrink**, Manistee, Mich., presents its Premium Shrink Wrap. Dr. Shrink is one-stop shopping for all shrink wrap products and accessories, including heat tools, tapes/adhesives, zipper access doors and venting. Dr. Shrink has formulated its own shrink wrap for unbeatable performance in all weather conditions. The premium shrink wrap is 100 percent virgin resin with maximum UV-inhibitors built in for long-term usage. Dr. Shrink stocks shrink wrap in widths of 12 to 60 feet, ships to anywhere in the world and distributes its products to more than 80 countries.

[www.dr-shrink.com](http://www.dr-shrink.com)



## EXTERIOR SPRAY FAUCET KIT

**Dura Faucet**, Camas, Wash., presents its Exterior Quick Connect Spray Dock Kit, available in either black or white/blue. This spray dock comes with our user-friendly quick connection. Whether boaters are washing down their boat or cleaning their big catch, the 15' coil hose and seven function multi-spray nozzle makes these tasks easier to do than cruising on the water.

[www.durafaucet.com](http://www.durafaucet.com)





## SINE WAVE INVERTER

**Xantrex**, Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, presents its Freedom XC Pro – a true sine wave inverter with a built-in lithium-ion battery charger and transfer switch. Easy to install with quick connect terminals and charges any battery chemistry, including lithium-ion. The Freedom XC Pro has a built-in NMEA-2K connector for integration with NMEA-compliant multi-function panels. Users can view and configure via Bluetooth app on iOS and Android. Runs sensitive loads like an induction cooktop, microwave and AC fridge with no issues. Has 50A passthrough charging and powering loads at the dock. Compact 3,000-watt/150A inverter and charger weighs only 18 pounds.

[www.xantrex.com/power-products/inverter-chargers/freedom-xcpromarine.aspx](http://www.xantrex.com/power-products/inverter-chargers/freedom-xcpromarine.aspx)



## WATER HOSE

**Teknor Apex**, Pawtucket, R.I., presents its Zero-G RV Marine water hose. Available in 25' and 50', Teknor Apex's Zero-G RV Marine water hoses are drinking water safe, 40 percent lighter in weight than vinyl hoses, kink-free and easy to manage. 600-plus PSI burst rated and has crush-resistant couplings. The Zero-G's advanced engineering guarantees zero tolerance with issues such as restrictive water flow, leaking and bursting. The product comes with a five-year warranty.

[www.apexhose.com/zero-g-rv-marine-hose](http://www.apexhose.com/zero-g-rv-marine-hose)



## BIMINI TOPS

**Carver by Covercraft**, Landrum, S.C., presents its Carver Bimini Tops, available in 2-bow, 3-bow and 4-bow round tube, and 4-bow square tube, to suit virtually any type of boat. The tops are available in premium 100 percent solution dyed marine acrylic, in a variety of colors.

[www.carvercovers.com](http://www.carvercovers.com)



## BATTERY DISCONNECT

**Intellitec Products**, DeLand, Fla., offers its 100-amp, water-resistant Battery Disconnect – a simple, reliable and cost-effective way to disconnect the battery of a boat. Operable from a conveniently located switch, no longer search for your battery disconnect. Intellitec's water-resistant version shields against leakage, as well as uses stainless steel, to prevent rusting from the elements. Intellitec's patented, continuous duty, latching relay prevents battery discharge when active. A trusted electronic solution, there are more than 2 million in usage today.

<https://intellitec.com>



## T-TOP BOAT COVER

**Classic Accessories**, Kent, Wash., offers its StormPro T-Top Boat Cover to provide a heavy-duty solution designed for long-term storage. The marine-grade fabric won't shrink or stretch, and its coating repels water and withstands sun exposure. Elastic cording provides a tight, custom-like fit; adjustable straps and quick-release buckles keep the cover secure. Available for boats from 16' to 22' long and beam widths from 96" to 106" wide, with cuts to allow room for accessories such as bow rails and running lights. Five-year warranty.



<https://classicaccessories.com/covers/boat-personal-watercraft>



## MARINE DISH SET

**Camp Casual**, Clarence Center, N.Y., presents its Marine Dish Set. Richly colored and vintage marine-inspired graphics decorate this shatter-resistant, melamine BPA-free set of dishes. Each set contains two 11" dinner plates, two 8" salad plates and two 6" bowls.

[www.campcasual.com](http://www.campcasual.com)



## COMBINATION STOVE/HEATER

**Scan Marine Equipment**, Seattle, offers its Wallas Nordic Dt, a fully controllable diesel-fired stove and heater combination suitable for RV, trailer and marine use. Variable power produces up to 1,900 watts (6,600 BTU/hour) of cooking or heating power, which means the Nordic Dt can heat many boats effectively, using less than 7 ounces of fuel per hour. Incorporating altitude compensation, thermo room sensing and push-button starting, the Nordic Dt is designed to be quiet and easy to clean.

[www.scanmarineusa.com](http://www.scanmarineusa.com)



## WATER FILTER SYSTEM

**Periodic Products**, Sarasota, Fla., presents its FillFast Water Filter Systems. FillFast patented, non-toxic, pleated filter media filters high levels of stain-causing metals like rust, iron, copper and manganese from source water. FillFast also helps extend the life of RO membranes and water softener resins. Used with a water softener, FillFast creates spot-free water for washing RV or marine vessels. Pre-filters up to 10,000 gallons of water before needing to replace filters and is designed for easy portability. Save time! Save money!

[www.fillfastfilters.com](http://www.fillfastfilters.com)





### HOSE/CORD CADDY

**Stromberg Carlson**, Traverse City, Mich., presents its HC-75 Hose/Cord Caddy. The hose/cord caddy solves the twisted and tangled hose storage problem. Each hose end unwinds while the bulk of the hose remains neat and tidy in the caddy. It holds up to 75' of water hose or 50' of 30-amp cord. The stackable Hose/Cord Caddy measures 17" wide and 6.5" tall. Hose accessories can be conveniently stored in the center well. Made in the U.S.A.

[www.StrombergCarlson.com](http://www.StrombergCarlson.com)

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[balrvproducts.com](http://balrvproducts.com)



### WATERPROOF LED SPEAKERS

**PQN Audio**, Morro Bay, Calif., offers its Waterproof BT LED Speakers. The company's new 6.5" Waterproof RV653BTLD Series coaxial speakers are designed with an integrated Bluetooth amp and audio-driven LED show. The onboard 120-watt Bluetooth amp means no additional amp source is needed. Paired phones/tablets/laptops control volume and the audio-driven LED show. Available in white or black. Mounting depth 3.5" and 12-14VDC input. For more information, contact the company directly. PQN offers full OEM support.

[www.rvspeakers.net](http://www.rvspeakers.net)

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RVP



# Parts Customers: Lure Them In

*Merchandising marine products in RV parts departments isn't so difficult if the right steps are taken.*



**By Linda Cahan**

Linda Cahan is the president of Portland, Ore.-based Cahan & Co., a consulting firm that works with retailers of all sizes and categories to improve their bottom line through creative, affordable and appropriate visual merchandising, store design and renovations. For more information, visit [www.lindacahan.com](http://www.lindacahan.com)

**RV** travelers take many paths. Many of those lead to rivers, lakes and coastal areas to soak up the negative ions created by the waterways that make them feel fully alive and happy. Among these are also sun-seekers leaving cold climates for warmth.

Marine stores have built-in customers whose passion centers around the water and sun. There is a built-in crossover opportunity for RV stores to bring in some marine-related products. And for the sun-seekers, solar is taking off in a big way as an add-on for many RVers.

If you've been selling and or servicing RVs for a while now, you probably have a core group of customers who come back for service, chemicals, accessories and parts. Hopefully you've developed friendly relationships with many of these people and have a sense of their travel interests. Think about doing a little market study and simply ask them if they travel to lakes and saltwater locations and if they would be interested in having fishing and marine accessories available to them at your RV store.

I visited West Marine in Tigard, Ore., to learn more about the crossover merchandise between marine and RV customers. I was instantly impressed.

The store was neat, very well-merchandised, the lighting was good and there was obvious care taken on the endcaps and gondolas to create an easy-to-shop customer experience. All the products were turned with their labels forward, prices all in the same place, and if there were empty spaces, duplicates were brought up to the shelf fronts to fill in supply chain gaps.

Derek Shaw, the store manager, was greatly helpful. His team focuses on knowledge of the industry combined with conscious visual merchandising. Shaw sees a lot of RV people who come in for marine-grade electrical wire, paint, adhesives and electronics – all things that will stand up far better to salty air than many of the more generic products found in an RV store.

## Steps to Consider

Consider offering your customers these better quality and performing products for their trips to the coasts and the few inland saltwater locations in the U.S.A.: the Great Salt Lake, Soda Lake in Washington state, Walker Lake in Nevada, and the Pecos River in Texas and New Mexico.

You may be wondering how on earth you're going to fit this new stuff onto your potentially already crowded fixtures and how to differentiate it from the regular RV products. Thanks to some supply chain issues, you may have some extra space on your walls and gondolas. If not, consider that these items are pricier with a decent profit margin and will differentiate your store from others in the area.

There are two ways you can comfortably and successfully add these categories.

Possibility one: Time-intensive but visually powerful. Let people know that all the merchandise in this one hanging and shelved section is marine-grade product. You can hire a professional painter to paint the wall or gondola a blue tone.

You always want contrast with your merchandise and labels. If the merchandise has darker labels, use a lighter, brighter blue. If the labels are light, a darker blue will work well. Make sure the paint is a satin or a semi-gloss finish.

Once painted, add a sign to the top that either spans the entire blue space or is centered on top. This sign would be best if it has white letters on a blue background. Any sign maker can do this for you. The blue can be in the same family as the wall – just think of a paint strip from a hardware or paint store.

It often shows the same blue from light to dark shades. Bring your blue fixture paint to the sign maker and have them find a compatible (but not the same) blue for the sign. This will grant these products instant visibility and sales.

For the DIY person: Use masking tape, newsprint, or plastic sheeting, and with your doors open, prep the area on the gondola or wall you



*“Education is a huge part of selling a new category. Make sure your staff understands the reasons why a customer may prefer or need marine-grade paint, epoxy, wire, and so on. Explain the virtues and ease of having solar energy.”*



want to paint blue. Thoroughly cover all the nearby merchandise, as well as the floor. Remember, a good paint job is 80 percent prep and 20 percent paint.

Lightly sand the wall or metal gondola first and pick up all the paint dust with a slightly damp rag. Whether you spray or use a fine, wide brush, try to find a low VOC paint so your store isn't toxic or smell that way.

Possibility two: Easier. Get stick-on labels printed that can go on the front of each piece of marine-grade product that simply says “Marine Grade” or something else that accurately differentiates it from regular merchandise.

Merge the marine goods in with the regular products within each category. For example, electrical wire by the foot would be

merchandised next to regular RV wire – but would have a (larger) sticker saying, “Marine Grade”. This will explain the increased cost. At least it should. There's always that one customer ... as you well know.

### Successfully Selling Crossover Products

Another big crossover seller is the blow-up paddle board category. Co-sales are electric pumps. While a hand/foot powered pump is only \$20, most customers will come back and buy the \$99 electric pumps after dealing with pumping by hand more than once. Kayaks sell as well but attaching them to an RV has some more technical challenges.

I asked Shaw, the store manager for West Marine, about fishing



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- Available in Tyre Gards (2 per box) & Multi-Axle Tyre Gards (1 per box)

#### AVAILABLE IN:

Diamond Plated

\*Not available for Multi-Axle Tyre Gards

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**With just a bit of organization, it's possible to successfully integrate aftermarket products for boats into an RV parts showroom.**

rod sales to RVers. He said that most people bought their equipment at or near the location where they were planning to fish, as rods, reels, lures and line are very site-specific.

However, the dealership sells more generic fishing equipment that can unscrew and become far easier to store in a small place. People often buy that and then shop locally at their fishing place for the smaller accessories for that specific locale and type of fish.

The two Curtis Trailers stores in the Portland, Ore., area specialize in fifth wheels. A fairly new and very strong seller has been solar panels. Angela Pettit, a sales associate at the Beaverton, Ore., Curtis Trailers store told me that solar panels are being added frequently to new and existing units.

In the Pacific Northwest, boondocking – dry camping with no power – is very popular. Adding two 200-watt solar panels will keep the batteries charged. Pettit suggested I get in touch with Dan Schneider, her sales manager, as “he is the true solar expert” at the dealership.

Schneider gave me more specific merchandising information about the solar panels and lithium batteries. The actual large panels take up too much on-floor space. Most often, they are shown on actual RVs that are for sale outside.

There also is a catalog handy to show customers solar options. The selection of batteries is most often on shelves, or in the case of NTP-STAG products – on their vendor rack. A solar category that can be stocked on shelves are the fold-up solar panels. They fold together and apart like a suitcase and are put on the ground next to a RV.

### **Product Education is Key**

Education is a huge part of selling a new category. Make sure your staff understands the reasons why a customer may prefer or need marine-grade paint, epoxy, wire and so on. Explain the virtues and ease of having solar energy.

If you carry kayaks, blow-up paddle boards, or fishing rods and tackle, it's important that parts representatives can talk about their product features and benefits.

Knowledge is power and once they understand the benefits, based on their travel plans, you'll have a grateful customer. **RV**



# News of Note

Industry news from across North America



Lance is building a new production facility in Indiana to produce travel trailers like the one pictured here for dealers in the eastern half of North America.

## Lance Camper to Build Hoosier Production Facility to Serve East Coast Dealers

California-based Lance Camper is expanding its manufacturing footprint by building a new production facility in Decatur, Ind.

The company said the Decatur facility – which will consist of an assembly plant and a component warehouse – will produce travel trailers for Lance dealers in the eastern half of North America.

The company's 22-acre campus in Lancaster, Calif., will continue to operate as it always has, the company said.

"With the growing interest in and demand for travel trailers, our Decatur facilities will help to better serve those dealers in the Midwest and in the East," said **Mike Lanciotti**, president, REV Recreation Group. "Adams County is known for its loyal and diligent workforce, many with expertise in RV manufacturing; we look forward to more employees joining the Lance team."

This expansion will create more than 100 jobs in Adams County, with initial recruiting expected to begin in early April. Preliminary startup is planned for July, with production ramp-up to follow for six to eight months.

Lance received support both from Adams County and the Indiana Economic Develop Corp. in the form of property tax abatements and incentive-based tax credits.

"We're excited Lance Camper has chosen to expand operations in Indiana and look forward to supporting the company's continued growth," said **Ann Lathrop**, executive vice president of global investments for the Indiana Economic Development Corp.

## NTP-STAG Parent Company Keystone Automotive Open Florida Warehouse

Keystone Automotive Operations, parent company of NTP-STAG, has opened its newest distribution center in Ocoee, Fla.



The 200,000-square-foot Orlando area facility will service the company's automotive, RV and marine retail customer base throughout the state. The company said the location brings Keystone's network of nationwide distribution centers to eight, in addition to 37 stand-alone cross-dock facilities, increasing the company's total distribution footprint across North America to about 3 million square feet.

"We are elated to be a part of communities of Ocoee and greater Orlando," said Keystone Automotive Operations President **Bill Rogers**. "The local government has been wonderful to work with and very helpful with the process of opening a large distribution center there. This Central Florida location positions our inventory in the heart of our Florida automotive, RV and marine customer base, allowing us to provide enhanced service with later cut times and in many cases, earlier daily delivery times."

The facility will be staffed by a team of more than 50 and serviced by the company's private trucking fleet which distributes aftermarket products for all the industries served by Keystone Automotive Operations, NTP-STAG and SeaWide distribution brands, respectively.



## Blue Ox Promotes Cole to Director of Automotive Sales

Blue Ox Products has promoted **Chad Cole** to director of automotive sales.

Cole will continue in his current role as West Coast regional manager until a replacement is named, according to Blue Ox.

"When I look back at the last five years and the progress we have made with Blue Ox in the RV industry, I am confident in equal success for our new automotive division," Cole said.

Blue Ox said Cole's appointment will benefit the company's developing relationships with automotive parts dealers and focus Blue Ox offerings in the automotive category.

"Blue Ox is known as the No. 1 supplier in aftermarket towing, especially with RV dealerships," said **Mike Hesse**, company CEO. "Chad Cole is the perfect choice to lead the Blue Ox Automotive Sales Division as we continue to diversify our product lines for everything towing."



# News of Note

## Jayco Promotes Several into Key Sales, Marketing Positions



The Jayco family of companies has promoted several key executives in sales and marketing. Specifically, the company has promoted the following:

- **Nic Martin**, former general manager for Jayco and Entegra

Coach motorized group, has been promoted to vice president of sales for Jayco Motors & Towables and Entegra Coach.

- **Brion Brady**, former general manager of Highland Ridge RV and Starcraft RV, has been promoted to vice president of sales for Highland Ridge and Starcraft.

- **Ryan Eash** will backfill **Nic Martin's** position of general manager of the Motorized Group from his prior role of director of product development.

- **Trey Miller** assumes the position of vice president of marketing. He was previously director of corporate marketing.

"With the promotion of these talented, trusted leaders, I am confident that the structure of the sales and marketing organizations will properly align the company to assist in reaching our aggressive targets, while focusing on quality, dealer relations and employee relations," said **Ken Walters**, president of Jayco.

## Ranger Distribution Hires Mike Steele for Sales Role

**Mike Steele** has joined the Ranger Distribution team.

Steele started DEHCO in 2006. After a successful start-up of DEHCO Commercial, Steele was asked to help grow the newest division of the company, Remis America.

In 2015, Steele moved to LaVanture Products Co., where he built relationships with all levels of OEM purchasing, production and sales teams, managed major accounts, worked with the purchasing team to add new products and vendors to the company's offerings, and helped OEMs successfully manage their inventory, according to RDI.

**Brent Diver**, a founding partner at RDI, said, "Our RDI team has known and respected Mike for a long time. He has an incredible scope of experience from sales to product development and everything in between. He is a perfect match for RDI, our culture and what we have planned for our long-term growth. Mike brings a special energy and positive attitude that makes everyone around him better. We are very excited to have him on the team and to support him as he continues to build on the broad base of relationships he has across the industry."



Pictured from left to right are Jaeger team members **Kyle Upp**, **Colton Phelan**, **Owen Strieter**.

## Jaeger-UniTek Promotes Three in Sales Roles

Jaeger-UniTek Sealing Solutions has promoted **Colton Phelan**, **Kyle Upp** and **Owen Strieter** to key sales leadership roles.

Phelan is promoted to vice president of sales and will lead all activities in managing the development of new sealing solutions to serve Jaeger's automotive, industrial and RV customers. Upp and Strieter are now promoted to market managers, RVs.

Upp and Strieter joined Jaeger-UniTek in 2021 as key account managers serving the RV market with the rapidly expanding use of Flip 'N Seal, a patented slide-out sealing system.



## MCE Promotes Chandrani to VP of Marketing

**Mitul Chandrani**, formerly director of marketing for Mission Critical Electronics (MCE), is now the vice president of marketing at the company.

In his new role, Chandrani is going to oversee marketing for all of MCE's subsidiary brands. He will be responsible for defining and executing marketing strategy for Mission Critical Electronics by providing direction for brand level marketing strategies. He and his team will streamline and standardize the company's marketing activities across the MCE portfolio of brands to ensure that it remains true to its brands but within a consistent MCE style. In addition, Chandrani and his team will ensure that people, culture, processes and systems all support MCE's global strategy and performance expectations.

Mission Critical is the parent company of Xantrex, which Chandrani first joined in 2007.



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# In Case You Missed it

Breaking news exclusives from RV PRO's website



**Brent Kattau (left) and Joel Lederman are co-founders of Elevation Park Models.**

## Park Model Builder: 'A Market to be Had'

Elkhart, Ind.'s newest RV manufacturer is run by a pair of industry veterans with one sole focus: Park models.

**Brent Kattau and Joel Lederman** are co-founders of Elevation Park Models.

The two have nearly three decades experience between them working exclusively with park models.

"This is what we know, and with the demand for the product and the lack of manufacturers ... there is no reason to go into an already overloaded market," said Kattau. "When you drive by these fields of RVs sitting everywhere you don't see park models. We like where this market is heading and have no intention of worrying about any other markets."

Park models have been increasing in popularity as of late – as has every other style of RV – and it became clear to the partners that there was room for another player in that market, Lederman said.

"We were both doing very well in a small family company, but we felt we had more to offer," he said. "I had dealers asking for more product and we were not able to fulfill their orders, so we knew the market was there to be had."

The two were in talks about possibly going into business together for about a year, even discussing buying a piece of the previous company they worked for, but ultimately decided that with their experience, they could deliver something unique and quickly carve out a niche for themselves.

The pair have built a 65,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Elkhart that is set to go live with production any day, Lederman said.

"The beauty of our building is that Brent and I were able to completely design this from scratch, and when you have a blank slate, you are able to be much more efficient with your space," he said.

Elevation has already been able to put together a dealer network of nearly 20 coast-to-coast, primarily through the contacts they had developed in their previous jobs. And despite a severe shortage of labor in Elkhart, the company will build the first unit with about two dozen employees on staff, which is about what it had been shooting for.

**Read more:** <http://rvpro.link/486c9>

## RVTI's Anglemeyer Travels Far and Wide Seeking Tech Recruits



As the RV Technical Institute's director of recruitment, it's doubtful that **Tracy Anglemeyer** ever really puts her luggage away. She is racking up the frequent flyer miles in her new position.

Brought on board in December to fill the newly created role at RVTI, Anglemeyer wasted no time after the holidays in jumping on planes and mining for recruits to become RVTI-certified technicians wherever she could find them.

"In January, I spent quite a bit of time out working with various areas of the industry. I was at Tampa for the (SuperShow) ... Then it was straight on to the NTP-STAG Show (where we) had a breakout university session to a full room, including a lot of dealerships but a few industry people also," she said. "Phil Ingrassia was in attendance from the RVDA. ... We signed up a lot of dealerships at that show, which was good, and it's a great partnership there that (NTP-STAG) let us do that."

Anglemeyer's hiring came at a time when RVTI was finally able to go full-bore into recruiting and training technicians. The relatively new Institute was only able to graduate one class of students – who achieved Level One certification – before COVID hit, which shut down all onsite classes at its headquarters in Elkhart, Ind., and forced the staff to re-work its business plan.

Whether it's dealerships, community colleges or even state criminal justice systems, it's now Anglemeyer's job to forge relationships and bring more students into RVTI's certification programs. The institute has the ambitious target of recruiting and training at least 1,000 new RV techs into the field from outside of the RV industry, and that's not even counting those who are already in the industry that RVTI is trying to bring in to earn their certification.

**Read more:** <http://rvpro.link/ses3l>

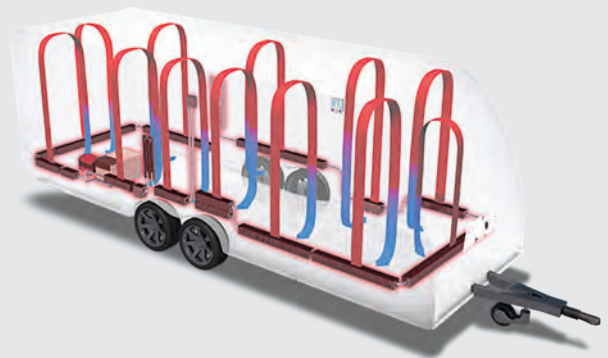




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