

U.S. jobless claims surge, C3

Deaths: C4 Weather: C6

Business & Money

Lexus rides
to top of list for
dependability, C3

Inventor floats idea to clean pools

By NICOLE BLAKE
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Scot Weiss left a full-time career in finance and accounting for one that requires taking financial risks and fiddling with gadgets in the garage.

The onetime chief financial officer for Orlando developer Cameron Kuhn made the switch to inventor after he was diagnosed with attention-deficit disorder, a condition marked by varying amounts of distractibility, impulsiveness and hyperactivity.

The diagnosis, he said, actually gave him the confidence to pursue his somewhat hidden passion: inventing things.

"It was all a revelation to me when I found out," the Orlando resident said of his medical condition. "I started embracing the creativity, instead of pushing it away."

Weiss, 43, has spent the past couple of years creating, manufacturing and modifying a device for cleaning swimming pools and other large water features. He likens his Parachute Skimmer — which started as a way to rid his backyard pool of dog hair — to a push broom for the water.

He still doesn't have a manu-

facturer or distributor, but he has managed to sell several of the devices to one of the region's big theme-park companies.

"Now the hard work begins," said Jerry Ross, executive director of the Disney Entrepreneur Center in Orlando. "Inventors like Scot," once they create and seek a patent for their brainstorm, have to take on the roles of production manager, sales director and finance chief for their fledgling enterprises.

Weiss, who has spent an estimated \$50,000 of his own money on the project so far, acknowledges that "it's really tough for a new product that's not proven to get on the shelf." He has, among other things, tried contacting high-profile companies, chief executives and celebrities in hopes of building support for his invention.

Weiss produced 10 versions of the Parachute Skimmer before settling on a basic design. With each variation, he realized that the skimmer could be improved further, whether it was using a more chlorine-friendly material or altering the design to cater to specific situations.



MARIE D. DE JESUS/ORLANDO SENTINEL

Lifeguard Matt Tobler demonstrates the Parachute Skimmer at the YMCA Aquatic Center off International Drive.

PLEASE SEE INVENTOR, C2

INVENTOR

FROM PAGE C1

"It's amazing because it's cutting our staff time for getting debris out of the pool," said Duffy Dillon, owner of FLA Aquatics Inc., a South Florida company that operates swim clubs and swimming schools. Weiss, who has sold a handful of skimmers, gave Dillon one to demonstrate its usefulness in the field.

The floating device comes in three versions — residential, commercial and industrial — that vary in length and durability depending on the intended use. SeaWorld's new Aquatica water park plans to begin using four of the commercial versions this fall to round up floating debris.

The SeaWorld skimmers range in width from 7 to 10 feet and remain stationary as they collect debris from flowing water. Residential skimmers are 5 feet wide and are steered with either a rope or a pole.

"It looks like a viable product for our industry," said Mi-

chael Garland, executive vice president of Recreonics Inc., a Kentucky-based company that sells swimming-pool equipment and supplies to institutional and commercial customers. Garland said in an e-mail that he's reviewing the Parachute Skimmer and may include it in the company's 2009 catalog.

Before Weiss' medical diagnosis in 2005, focusing on projects for long periods of time was a challenge for him. He said he often thought of ways to solve everyday problems but didn't always follow through with the ideas. After a decade of working as a finance manager, he met Kuhn when he enrolled in a creative-writing class at Rollins College.

Kuhn rose to prominence in Orlando as a redeveloper of old buildings in the downtown core. He then tackled the biggest redevelopment project in downtown history — a three-tower complex now called The Plaza — and bought the Church Street Station dining-and-entertainment complex before crashing back to earth

last year when the commercial real estate market stalled.

Weiss joined Kuhn's operation in January 2004, but the two parted ways about nine months later.

As for his Parachute Skimmer, Weiss is pushing ahead with newer and different versions, including models that could clean up entire lakes and canals, or serve as search-and-rescue aids.

In June, he conducted two demonstrations for the city of Fort Lauderdale; he intended for the large skimmer to attach to a boat and collect debris, but the device's netting couldn't withstand the forces. He's modified the industrial model based on suggestions from the city's public works department and hopes to demonstrate the device again this month.

"It's not only inventing," he noted, "but trying to get it out there and market it to potential investors and customers."

Nicole Blake can be reached at nblake@orlandoseninel.com or 407-540-4225.