

John Hemken

Chiefland, Florida



A&M Manufacturing, Inc.

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur John Hemken:

Tell us about your business and the value it brings to your customers.

Founded in 1996, A&M Manufacturing started as a custom fiberglass Catamaran & Trimaran pontoon boat company producing rugged, low maintenance and long lasting boats.

New management took over the business from the founder in September 2017. A signature step in A&M's turn around was purchasing a six acre Chiefland, FL production facility in May, 2019.

The new management team is well on its way to accomplishing their mission – rethinking /disrupting the fiberglass floating platform markets. The A&M Manufacturing team has transitioned from its custom boat heritage to scaling up production lines that build superior

fiberglass floating platform boats. The proprietary fiberglass platform hull designs provide a fuel efficient, fast planing, smooth, stable, and quiet ride.

“An A&M boat is the last boat you will buy!”

Talk about the ah-ha moment that led you to your entrepreneurial journey or the evolution that led to the idea of your company. Or what brought you to the company?

Prior to September, 2017 my two partners now (Tory & Amy Brodahl) were Marine Canvas/Upholstery suppliers to A&M's founder/former owner. In late September, 2017 they were not getting paid and found that the founder/former owner was just weeks away from having to close the business after building boats for over 21 years. Since my consulting practice at the time specialized in small business turnarounds, Tory & Amy asked if I would be willing to fly down from Milwaukee, WI to see if there was anything I could do to help the business.

On September 30, 2017 we spent 14 hours and restructured the business from top to bottom. Tory, Amy and I immediately assumed the leadership roles for the business since the founder/former owner felt hopeless and did not know what to do. He had taken (and spent) 28 deposits without building any of those projects. As a result, he had 11 legal issues ranging in severity from requested refunds to personal/business judgements.

At first, we were simply going to help the founder/former owner turn

around the business in 6-12 months and then get a portion of the sale proceeds, but it quickly became clear that the founder/former owner was a good guy/great boat builder but was a very poor businessman. Therefore, we all worked without salary for the first year, made all 28 customers whole, unwound all 11 legal issues & ended up purchasing the business along the way in February, 2018.

Describe some major challenges you've found in growing your business and explain how you overcame them.

We had to immediately fire the founder/former owner's General Manager because of an employee's sexual harassment charges plus financial irregularities. Because of the aforementioned spent deposits, there was only \$1,000 in the business checking account. Making all 28 customers whole by completing their projects plus resolving all 11 legal issues cost us over \$357,000 – which required incredible cash flow management over the first year plus personal money to make payroll at times. We were able to solve our initial facility constraints by purchasing our current six acre Chiefland, FL manufacturing facility with an SBA loan in May, 2020.

Tell us the challenges you foresee in the next three years.

While we have begun the transition from a custom boat business to that of key boat designs with a production mindset, we still have a long way to go to implement the A&M Operating System – leveraging the concepts of lean manufacturing, agile/scrum concepts & the traction organizational model. We need to build a school to work feeder system

with our local school systems since we will double, then triple our workforce in the next three years. We also have to build our own internal training & development systems to grow our own higher level fiberglass, welding & assembly talent.

Explain your company's competitive edge over other companies in your market.

Fiberglass hulls/pontoons are superior to aluminum pontoons because of durability, customization, planing capability (30% more fuel efficient + 30% faster). We also have in-house upholstery, metal fabrication & final assembly expertise that allows us to be a one stop shop

Explain the benefits of Florida to your future growth plans: (Ex: lifestyle, talent pool, infrastructure, geographic position, regulatory, income taxes, trade, environmental costs, land availability, other).

Florida benefits = weather for fiberglass production, geographic location for access to key customers, trade proximity to the Caribbean, no state income tax.

What does it mean to you to be selected as a GrowFL Florida Companies to Watch Honoree?

What it means to us is that the three years we spent turning this company around, making customers whole, saving/increasing employment & creating new markets was worth the sacrifice and hard work. Our entire team feels valued and recognized for what people

around here call a business turnaround miracle.

Is there anyone you'd like to thank?

Partners (Tory & Amy Brodahl), My Wife (Kathleen) who was willing to move from Milwaukee, leaving five grown kids & seven grandkids in the Midwest and David Pieklik (Nature Coast Economic Development).

What is your advice for aspiring entrepreneurs?

Why not you?

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