

Launching into a new realm



Aqua-Draulics showroom consultant Letitia Scott (left) and co-owner Marianne Zimmerer at the company's Rockledge, Fla., showroom. Aqua-Draulics has been in business for more than three decades.

Luxury products, flexibility help Aqua-Draulics excel as a one-shop supply house.

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Photos by Michael G. Zimmerer / Michael G. Zimmerer Photography

Mike Zimmerer understands how to achieve liftoff. It's hard not to know how to take off when you're working in the aerospace and space shuttle industries. But even after working a few years in a romanticized industry such as aerospace, Zimmerer wanted to make a change.

"In 1976 I was a little disenchanted with the aerospace industry," Zimmerer recalls. "I was young and I wanted to see the world. I wanted to get out of Los Angeles."

Zimmerer — a City of Angels native — connected with an old boss who had been laid off from the Skylab program at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. "He convinced me to come to Florida," Zimmerer says. "He had done some work on starting a plumbing supply company."

What's in a name?

Aqua-Draulics is an unusual name for a supply house, but it's a name with history for the 11,000-sq.-ft. operation tucked away between natural barriers some 54 miles east of Orlando in the town of Rockledge.

Zimmerer's old boss had developed and patented a hydraulic boat lift

he expected to be the next best thing and thought there was going to be such a demand for the product that the team (including two other investors) should create a supply house for materials.

"It basically worked on a garden hose and was made out of PVC pipe," Zimmerer says of the lift. "We developed that as a business. We were a little bit headstrong. We thought we were going to sell so many of these boat lifts that we needed a supplier. We decided to have Aqua-Draulics Plumbing Supply to buy our material from so we'd have it on both ends. Needless to say, the boat lifts didn't take off. The plumbing supply did."

The "Draulics" in Aqua-Draulics still exists today as Aqua-Draulics Marine. It manufactures lifts and gates for whales, which are sold to SeaWorld and other marine water parks around the world. In 1991, Zimmerer and his wife, Mary Anne, decided to focus on the plumbing supply industry and today no longer have a working partnership with Aqua-Draulics Marine.

A balancing act

The Zimmerers, who married in 1986, have worked well together for the 21 years they've co-owned Aqua-Draulics. They continue to do strong business, just outside Florida's aerospace center. However, the job never ends for the pair.