

## Ahoy in Anaheim

By JANE YU

Anaheim-based boat maker **Willard Marine Inc.** is “recreating itself.”

Again.

The 56-year-old company last shifted gears in the 1970s when it changed its focus from leisure boats to government contracts, according to co-owner **Annie Summers**.

Now Summers and other members of a new generation of ownership are out to change course by targeting the commercial segment.

Willard Marine, which has about \$20 million in annual revenue, turns out between 70 and 90

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Summers: teacher-turned-boat builder on shop floor in Anaheim

## Willard Marine

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boats a year. Its vessels' sizes range from 16 to 60 feet. Prices start from about \$80,000 for a smaller craft and can “easily go up to half a million, \$2 [million] to \$3 million,” according to President **Ulrich Gottschling**.

The company, with about 70 workers overall, builds boats at its headquarters on Grove Street, just south of Mira Loma Avenue in the Anaheim Canyon business corridor. It tests products in Long Beach and also has a repair yard in Virginia Beach, Va.

Its boats in recent years have been predominantly for military and law-enforcement use, including training functions, rescue operations, public safety and port security.

Willard Marine's client portfolio includes the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army, as well as the Alaska Marine Highway System and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

The company has also made boats for navies in Lebanon and the Philippines, among other nations. It typically handles foreign-government deals through the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program.

### Offshore Operations, Tourism

Offshore operations and tourism prospects are prompting the push into the commercial sector.

“Our expectation is we're going to start seeing the commercial side grow quite a bit over the next year or so, in the oil and gas industry and for people who need crew boats,” Gottschling said.

He said the company plans to more than double production, with an eye toward making 200 a year and the possibility of bolt-on deals.

“We've been predominantly a fiberglass boat manufacturer, and we're moving more actively into the aluminum business,” he said. “We're starting conversations of acquisitions to add additional brands to our portfolio.”

Strengthening the Willard Marine brand has been a key objective for the company. It's about to catch plenty of publicity when its boats get featured on TNT's “The Last Ship,” a new drama expected to air later this year. One of its boats also was on the big screen as part of the film “Captain Phillips” starring **Tom Hanks**.

Willard Marine has created and stocked a



Traditional strength: company has specialized in fiberglass vessels, now looks to expand with aluminum

number of new management positions in recent months, including Director of Marketing **Karen Jacquelin**, who joined in January. She's worked in management roles at Newport Beach-based real estate developer **Irvine Company** and New York-based ad company **Young & Rubicam Group**.

Other new executives include **Taylor Hunter**, director of global sales, a veteran of remote visual inspection equipment maker **Karl Storz Industrial America** and **Eagle Pacific Powerboats**; and **Ning Wang**, director of operations and program management, formerly at **AnyData Corp.**, an Irvine-based consumer electronics manufacturer that was sold last year.

### Relative Newcomer

Gottschling is a relative newcomer, too. He joined the boat manufacturer a year ago, after about 20 years working in finance and operations for technology businesses.

He wore the chief financial officer and chief operating officer hats at **AnyData** before joining Willard Marine. Gottschling

previously served as CFO at **SRS Labs Inc.**, an audio technology engineering company in Santa Ana that was sold to Calabasas-based **DTS Inc.** in 2012.

Summers has been with the company through most of its history, including the nearly 30 years that her father, **George Angle**, owned it.

Summers and her brother, **Bill Angle**, took over the company in 2011 after their father died. She previously was a special-education teacher at a junior high school in San Clemente.

### Beginnings

Willard Marine's predecessor, **Willard Boat Works**, was founded in 1957 by **Bill Tighe**, who began building boats in Costa Mesa.

“Originally we built trawlers, recreational vessels,” Summers said. “And then in 1974, we were commissioned to construct a 120-foot oceanographic survey vessel, which was the largest fiberglass boat at the time. I'm not sure who owns it today, but it was for the See family back then, [of] **See's Candies Inc.**”

It also was in the 1970s that an oil embargo

was imposed on the U.S. by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Price hikes of oil-derived products posed a challenge to the boat industry.

“The market dried up for so many people in terms of producing a leisure boat,” Summers said. “People didn't want boats and didn't spend money on gas. It was a weird time in our economy.”

That's when Willard Marine steered toward the military market.

**Jack Hochadel**, who has been with the company for about 50 years and currently serves as an adviser, got a contract in 1976 to make 31 boats for the U.S. Coast Guard.

“That was the first time Willard Marine kind of changed,” Summers said. “And when Bill and I took over the company, we had to make a decision that we're not going to stay the way we were. We decided to go for growth.”

Willard Marine recently landed a contract with the U.S. Army, a new client, to make 42 rescue boats for delivery by August.

“We've never done boats for the Army before,” Gottschling said. “This order is an example of us reaching out to customers that we hadn't interacted with before. Surprisingly, the Army has more boats than the Navy.”

Willard Marine's direct competitors on the fiberglass side include Lake Forest, Ill.-based **Brunswick Corp.**

### “Our Focus”

“Our focus is about not necessarily hitting quarterly numbers as public companies,” Gottschling said. “It's to take care of our customers, and if we serve them better than others, I think we'll be just fine. Part of it is making a great product. Part of it is taking a look at the other issues, like environmental issues. For instance, the boats we're making for the Navy—those involve different engines, different environmental rules. We're actively looking at different materials that we can use.”

New hires are planned for the manufacturing side, and the company will count on its newly assembled marketing team to claim new ground in the marketplace.

“We've got Karen and Annie working on the marketing side, positioning our brand name,” Gottschling said. “Some brands will be specifically for the commercial markets.” ■