

QUICK INFO

Orca Gear Inc.

Headquarters: 216 River

St., Troy 12180

Leadership: Cecilia

Domingos, CEO

Products/services: Makes

a high-tech, fashionable life

jacket

Web address:

www.orcagear.com



From left: Michael Lobsinger, chief technology officer of Orca Gear, Cecilia Domingos, and Jeffrey Betz, chief operating officer, wear their Float Tech jackets.

DONNA ABBOTT VLAHOS | THE BUSINESS REVIEW

MOST PROMISING ENTERPRISE OF THE YEAR

Orca Gear Inc.

BY RICHARD A. D'ERRICO
THE BUSINESS REVIEW

"No more drowning victims," says the ad flashing across the computer screen. "No more fashion victims. Introducing the world's first good looking life jacket."

The site belongs to **Orca Gear Inc.**, a Troy firm that makes the Float Tech Jacket. It looks just like a windbreaker, but it has an inflatable component that floats.

The idea for the company came from a class project at the Lally School at **Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute**. Cecelia Domingos, the company's CEO, Jeffrey Betz, its chief operating officer, and Michael Lobsinger, the chief technology officer, were among the students who decided to work on a product targeting the marine industry.

They market tested 30 product ideas, and whittled the number to 10. Concepts that were ditched included a boat-washing machine that would troll behind another boat, and deck-washing shoes.

Then, they turned their attention to life jackets.

People often choose not to wear standard orange life jackets because the jackets are bulky and restrict movement. According to the U.S. Coast Guard, nine out of 10 drowning victims were not wearing life jackets. In 2002, 524 Americans drowned in boating accidents.

And stylish is not a word that comes to mind when people think of life jackets.

Orca Gear wants to change that concept. Its yellow and blue Float Tech Jacket looks like an item in an L.L. Bean catalogue.

The floating device zips into the jacket. The jacket can inflate manually by the user pulling down on a lanyard or using an oral tube. It also inflates within 3-5 seconds of coming into contact with water. When entering the water, a disolveable tablet allows the release of a compressed spring. The spring fires a pin that punctures the compressed CO2 and inflates the vest.

The company expects to get its first patent and Coast Guard approval next year.

It costs \$395, more than other life jackets. But Lobsinger said that when you factor in the cost of the jacket and the flotation device, a customer comes out ahead.

The company already has sold \$100,000 worth of jackets. The company's founders have attended boat shows in Annapolis, Md., Newport, R.I., and Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and are working through catalogue companies to increase sales.

The first 1,500 jackets were manufactured in Vietnam.

The next run will be manufactured in China. Lobsinger is planning a trip to Asia to scout other manufacturing plants.

Orca Gear has won some local accolades, including winning a college business plan competition at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 2003 and being a finalist in the Summit in Tech Valley's business plan competition.

Lobsinger said the company has plans to do more than just stay afloat.

"Within five years, we'd like to get \$15 million to \$20 million on just this product," he said.

Other products are in the planning stage, he said.



rderrico@bizjournals.com | 518-640-6807

three ! cheers

● Congratulations to our three Rensselaer County winners.

The Business Review's 2004 Achievement Awards.

- **Vicarious Visions Inc.**
Small Company of The Year
- **Orca Gear**
Most Promising Enterprise
- **Mark Cattini**
Executive of The Year award

**RENSSELAER
COUNTY**

life looks good from here™

