



## AMEP CLIENT PROFILE

Black Feather Boats  
Juneau, AK

### *Black Feather Boats Achieves Success Through Collaboration*

#### Company Profile

Black Feather Boats, (BFB) set course as a boat repair facility in 1989. The company made the leap to manufacturing in July 2005 when it secured outside financing and purchased a catamaran mold. Located in Juneau, Alaska, Black Feather Boats employs 4 people.

#### Situation

BFB owner, Gregor Welpton, had been operating the repair business for several years when he came across a well-known nationwide boat builder selling the molds and all rights to a new high-performing catamaran hull design for pleasure and small commercial sports fishing applications. At the same time he found local high-end sports fishing lodges planning charter boat fleet upgrades with an eye on the new cat-designs due to speed, stability and fuel efficiency. Welpton purchased the molds, process and all rights to the design of the "ChilKat 30 Power Catamaran." What the comprehensive package lacked was the technical expertise for the Vacuum Infusion Process (VIP). The Vacuum Infusion Process is a method of fiberglass manufacture that uses a vacuum to pull the resin into the layers of fiberglass; whereas, the Standard Infusion Process uses pressure to push the resin into the fiberglass. The VIP uses about 30 to 40 percent less resin, takes about 20 percent less time and applies the resin more evenly, resulting in reduced weight and greater strength. Welpton quickly recognized the need for technical assistance and reached out to The Juneau Economic Development Council (JEDC). The JEDC contacted the Alaska Manufacturing Extension Partnership (AK-MEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, and an agreement to provide technical assistance was established.

## Solution

AK-MEP's VIP expert provided training in two parts: first, design, setup and manufacturing processes for the new mold and equipment to create the first boat; and second, training to fine-tune the production process. BFB identified a manufacturing opportunity and transformed itself into the first fiberglass boat builder in southeast Alaska. The regional economy has been expanded by substituting imported boats for locally produced vessels while creating a new industry for Juneau.

## Results

- Increased first-year revenue by \$110,000.
- Increased production.
- Streamlined production processes.
- Achieved a more competitive and profitable position in Alaska's boat building industry.

## Testimonial

"The Alaska Manufacturing Extension Partnership and the Juneau Economic Development Council gave us the extra boost we needed. The collaboration between the organizations gave me a team I could call on for talent. The team approach kept labor costs down and preserved our cashflow during startup, and we could respond to startup issues with the right skill set."

**Interested in learning more about how the Alaska Manufacturing Extension Partnership, Inc. can offer services to your growing business?**

**We are conveniently located mid-town at 701 Sesame St., Ste. 200, Anchorage, Alaska. Contact us at 907.279.2637 or [information@ak-mep.org](mailto:information@ak-mep.org).**