



BUSINESS REPORT / DAVID NELSON

C-Dory Marine Group has ramped up to meet the demands of a growing network of dealers. All of the versatile, rugged boats are built in Auburn.

Auburn's C-Dory builds boats with a hands-on approach

60 carpenters, craftsmen expand product lines, volume in consolidated Auburn plant

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BUSINESS REPORT STAFF

Auburn's C-Dory Marine Group builds recreational boats by hand, crafting them like fine furniture, and it's helped pay off in rapid business growth.

"We sort of do it the old-school way, rather than mass production," says Jeff Messmer, vice president of sales and marketing for C-Dory.

C-Dory expects to produce 268 boats this year, up from 232 last year and up from only about 70 just a few years ago.

The company employs 60 carpenters and craftsmen in its new location, a 48,000-square-foot building in Auburn. It sells its recreational and fishing power boats across the country.

"We make a point of emphasizing that we build by hand," Scot Reynolds, company president, said. "That's the way we like to do it."

"We sell to people on the East Coast who want to get out of the sun and to people on the West Coast who want to get out of the rain," Messmer said.

Before October of 2000 when Reynolds and his family bought the company, C-Dory was manufacturing only five to seven boats a month. The former owner was nearing retirement, Reynolds said, and didn't want to produce more boats.

Part of the company's growth has come from increased sales and part from acquisition of other boat producers. C-Dory Marine has three lines of boats — C-Dory, Skagit Orca, and Olympic — which come in various mod-

els. C-Dory Marine bought the Skagit Orca and Olympic lines in 2002.

C-Dory Marine had \$8 million in total sales for 2004 and projects \$10 million in sales this year. Its most successful dealer in 2004 was in Baltimore, selling 35 boats.

C-Dory boats range from 16 to 25 feet in length and are primarily used for cruising. Skagit Orcas are cabin cruisers, from 22 to 27 feet in length. Olympic boats are sport fishing boats and range from 22 to 26 feet long.

Customers can buy boats ready to go or can have C-Dory custom build a boat for them. Customers can specify what model they want, the engine size, the type of trailer, and whatever additional electronic devices they would like installed, among other things.

Reynolds said C-Dory's customers are adventurous.

"Our C-Dorys aren't used as much for fishing as they are for exploring," he said.

"Our typical customer is a 50- to 80-year-old baby boomer who's been around boats for a while and wants something that's very functional and simple," Messmer said. "Our customers make an informed decision. They don't just walk in the door and say, 'Wow, that's a neat boat. I'm going to buy it.' They've been looking at it for a few years. They've researched it. They've done their worksheet on the pros and

cons and the features. They come in armed and ready to make a decision."

"When you buy a C-Dory, you get more than just a great boat; you become part of a close C-Dory boating community," said Kirby Unti, a Renton minister and C-Dory boat owner. "My C-Dory is a poor man's yacht. I can safely go to all the places the big boys go and at an affordable price."

Until last November, the company built its C-Dorys in Kent. The Skagit Orca and Olympic manufacturing facility was in Monroe, an hour away and the combined square footage of the two buildings was only 27,000 square feet. The company decided to consolidate its operations.

"Having a facility an hour away from here in Monroe, it may as well have been in another state," Messmer said. "We weren't able to give adequate attention to those product lines (Skagit Orca and Olympic) with it being up there in Monroe."

"Our facility was inefficient," Reynolds said. "It was difficult operating two operations. All of our employees are in one spot now, so it's easier to manage."

At the Auburn facility, all the models are designed based on orders sent in by dealers and from individual customers.

A main selling feature of the C-Dory

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■ C-Dory Models

Price range
\$20k-\$90k

■ Skagit Orca Models

Price range
\$70k - \$130k

■ Olympic Models

Price range
\$50k - \$70k

