

East Coast Paddle stands up to the competition

EDGEWATER -- Two local entrepreneurs are hoping to put their stamp on the rapidly growing market for stand-up paddleboards with products manufactured right here in Southeast Volusia.

Stand-up paddleboarding, one of the fastest-growing water sports in the country, allows consumers to paddle anything from ocean surf to lakes and rivers. It is reportedly becoming a favorite cross-training activity for skiers, snowboarders and other athletes.

"The majority of the (stand-up) paddleboards currently on the market are made in China or Thailand," said Tim Baker, president and co-owner of East Coast Paddle/Halifax Glassing LLC, a 2-year-old company based in Edgewater.



"These (foreign-made) boards are mass-produced in facilities with no flexibility to change board designs based on customer needs and wants," Baker said in a recent interview.

East Coast Paddle, which relocated in October to a 6,000-square-foot warehouse unit here on Timaquan Trail in the Parktowne Industrial Center, offers an alternative for consumers looking for a better quality product, Baker said.

"The need for a USA-based manufacturer that can quickly and efficiently meet customer requests was a glaring need in the marketplace," said Baker, whose background includes 15 years on the corporate treadmill in management for major corporations such as PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Because East Coast Paddle's paddleboards are handmade, the company does not try to compete head-to-head with those made in Asia, Baker said.



Instead, the company appeals to consumers by pointing out that its products will last longer and are manufactured with eco-friendly materials. East Coast Paddle's boards can be found in surf shops and outfitter stores across Florida and the entire East Coast. Prices start at \$1,099 for a basic board.

"We can take custom orders through retailers. Our clients can order the thickness, length and even graphics that they want," Baker, 41, said during a recent interview. East Coast Paddle also uses aerospace technology to make its board lighter and stronger than the competition, he said.

Prior to its relocation, which cost about \$50,000, East Coast Paddle had been leasing space in a plant in New Smyrna Beach, but as customer demand for its boards increased, the company's owners started looking for a new larger site. The ceilings in the old site also were not really high enough to allow workers to move the 11 foot paddle boards with relative ease.

"The shorter ceilings made everyday chores an issue," said Chris Stallard, East Coast Paddle's other co-owner.

Baker and Stallard were fishing buddies before they decided to go into business together, said Stallard, 28.

East Coast Paddle employs 10 part-time workers and, with its larger plant, now has the capacity to produce up to 80 boards a month. The company also provides laminating services for several local surfboard manufacturers.

"For us to still be doing this labor of love, we consider ourselves to be lucky," Stallard said, adding that most of the surfboards sold in this country today are mass produced in China and Thailand.

"Two years from now, we hope to have 20 employees," he said.

Edgewater City Manager Tracey Barlow said the firm's willingness to open up here was a plus for the community and indicative of just how important water is to the local economy.

"The river is our niche," Barlow said. "It has been a secret for so long, but now that secret is starting to get out."

Besides making and selling paddleboards, East Coast Paddle also offers classes for people who want to learn how to ride paddleboards, as well classes in paddle fishing, paddle fitness, yoga-on-the-water class and ecotours. About 75 percent of the company's customers are women between the ages of 20 and 65, according to Baker.