



## Balancing Work

Andrew Sturner saved a marina from sinking, while keeping his family life afloat as well.

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***SOME ENTREPRENEURS WAIT YEARS FOR INSPIRATION TO STRIKE. FOR ANDREW STURNER, ALL IT TOOK WAS A TRIP TO HIS HOMETOWN MARINA IN FLORIDA.***

BY FRANCESCA DI MEGLIO

Just when it seems like every developer wants to knock down marinas to make room for residential apartments, serial entrepreneur Andrew Sturner is taking the opposite approach. As CEO of the marina investment company Aqua Marine Partners, Sturner is completely revamping the Hi-Lift Marina, the last of the marinas on the famous Thunder Alley in Aventura, Florida, where performance boats were first developed in the 1970s. When completed, it won't be your father's marina. According to Sturner, this is a whole new breed for boating enthusiasts looking for a home for their babies and a hangout for themselves.



R&R is a hot commodity for a businessman like Sturner. In fact, a desire for more family time is what led him to this latest venture in the marina industry in the first place. But reinventing his career was nothing new.

Before becoming an entrepreneur, Sturner jumped from being a computer programmer to a bankruptcy attorney in New York City. After fishing business owners out of trouble for a few years, Sturner decided he wanted to jump in and test the waters for himself. In the last two decades, he has founded a few companies, all of which have found success. "I call it my 20-year real world MBA," Sturner says.

In 1991, he launched his first enterprise, an interactive phone company that provided phone numbers the public could call for local information. In 1993, the largest shareholder, Moviefone, bought the business, which eventually went public and was sold to AOL.

By 1995, Sturner was picking up on the buzz about something futurists said would change the face of communication: the internet. He was hired by SportsLine.com in June 1995 as vice president of business development. In 1998, he was promoted to senior vice president of business development, and in 1999 he became the president, corporate & business development in June 1999.

SportsLine.com ultimately landed in the hands of Viacom and is now known as CBS SportsLine.com. Although this company is still thriving, after seven years with the company, Sturner decided it was time to move on. Besides being burned out from a work overload, he missed his wife and children.

A new path was definitely in order.

After discovering Hi-Lift, which is near his home, was up for sale, he knew he found it.

Originally, Aqua Marine Partners was to be Aqua Marine Petroleum, a fuel dock business. But as Sturner researched, he discovered a fragmented marina industry dominated by mom-and-pop shops that were being depleted by construction of residential apartments. It was an interesting supply and demand dynamic that got Sturner thinking about the possibility of an upscale marina business that could dominate the industry. He wanted a “roll-up-your-sleeves brick and mortar” enterprise that would keep him closer to his home in Florida— and he got it.

Sturner bought his first marina in 2002, and the company now has a total of four in Florida and Georgia. And the future will usher in even more expansion. Aqua Marine Partners will break ground on the new marina at Hi-Lift at the end of 2007, and it should be completed by the end of 2008. In addition, the company is currently pursuing three other projects and licensing the technology that replaces the fork lift to three other partners. Sturner says that Aqua Marine Partners boasts the ability to handle everything from licensing the technology to the architecture and engineering of the space.



The new facility is intended to be a showstopper. At about 115 feet, it will become a landmark in the Aventura skyline. Beautification of the surrounding community and green issues were a priority, Sturner says. Hi-Lift is a “clean marina,” meaning it follows rules and regulations to protect the environment designated by the state. And the high-tech computer-operated overhead bridge crane, known as the Vertical Yacht System, will haul up boats on a cushion of air and gently place them onto their racks, making the old means of moving yachts—loud, sooty, heavily polluting forklifts—obsolete.

Despite choosing this new venture out of a need to slow down, Sturner finds himself moving faster than ever. And the self-proclaimed workaholic hopes that his dedication will help the new Hi-Lift and the rest of his marina development business make a big splash.

## **LIFE LESSONS FROM A SUCCESS**

In 2001, Sturner made the decision to find a local business that would give him more time for his family. Although he admits that sacrifices are always made in the name of balancing work and family, he is doing a better job of it now than ever before. In the course of his 20-year career, he has learned many other things, too. Here, he shares a few of his life lessons.

### **1. PERSEVERANCE WORKS**

A sign at the place where Sturner and his kids study karate has become a motto for him. It says, "Perseverance is the hard work you've done after you've gotten tired of all the hard work you've already done." Sturner credits his discipline and willingness to follow through on projects for his success.

### **2. DAVID CAN BEAT GOLIATH**

When SportsLine.com launched, it was up against enormous challenges. ESPN was already hot on the scene. But the scrappy SportsLine entered battle like a champion by plugging away despite the obstacles of being smaller and having less money. The company's success was dependent on the caliber of the senior staff, which Sturner says outperformed and outshined those at bigger companies in the industry.

### **3. DARE TO DREAM**

"Everybody is rooting for your failure," Sturner says. "You just have to believe in yourself and go for it, and never let go of that dream."

### **4. BE A GOOD PERSON**

"You want to be remembered fondly," Sturner says. Although he is proud of his businesses, above all, he wants his legacy to be that of a good father and husband.