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THE HOVERTOON slides up onto Schramer's lawn from the Fox River without missing a beat. Schramer sees his innovative watercraft as something that would be very useful in rescue operations because it is larger than most hovercraft and would be able to carry more people.

## Schramer's Hovertoon nominated for Wisconsin Innovation Award

By Berlin Journal Newspapers Staff

Wisconsin has always been a forward-thinking state.

That is our motto, after all: Forward.

Inventors and innovators abound in the Badger State, and each year groups and individuals are recognized for their willingness to take risks and delve into areas that reach into the far corners of their imaginations.

**"THE WHOLE PREMISE BEHIND THE HOVERTOON IS THE ROTATING PONTOONS. THAT'S NOT BEEN DONE BEFORE ..."**

—DICK SCHRAMER

The Wisconsin Innovation Awards (WIA) hosts an event each year to celebrate those ideas, and this year a Berlin resident has been nominated to receive one of the awards.

Dick Schramer, inventor of the Hovertoon, will be in Madison in October as one of the 31 nominees.

In 2023 there were 25 nominees and nine were chosen as winners.

According to their website, WIA seeks "to celebrate and inspire innovation. The WIA

highlights and honors the development of groundbreaking and innovative ideas. If it is a transformational idea we want to celebrate it. We hope to encourage an even greater environment of innovation by bringing innovators together from various business sectors (e.g. tech, food, health-care, agriculture, nonprofits, education, government), and from throughout the state."

The group has strong support from Wisconsin businesses and education, including sponsorships from American Family Insurance, Wipfli, and the University of Wisconsin system.

Schramer's Hovertoon certainly fits the mold of Wisconsin, grassroots innovation.

It is part hovercraft, part pontoon boat, which may not seem particularly innovative since these two crafts have been around for a long time.

However, Schramer's innovation comes from the ability of the craft to transition between the two types of flotation.

A pontoon boat that can climb right up out of the water might seem like something out of a science fiction movie, but you can see just that right here in Berlin.

Schramer has always seen the Hovertoon's potential for rescue operations.

"You can go out and rescue a bunch of people at once versus one of these two or four person



BERLIN JOURNAL PHOTO

**DICK SCHRAMER'S HOVERTOON has been nominated for a Wisconsin Innovation Award, and will be featured at the awards ceremony at the University of Wisconsin in October. Schramer's invention is part hovercraft, part pontoon boat and can make easy transitions between land and water.**

jobs that would not haul a whole bunch," said Schramer.

He mentions ice fishermen who get pushed out into Green Bay or another large body of water, saying the Hovertoon would work well for that type of situation.

Flooded areas would also benefit from the craft because it would be able to make the transition from water to flooded streets with ease.

The most innovative part of the Hovertoon comes from its rotating pontoons that lift up to the side of the boat when it makes the transition to a hovercraft.

"It's getting more surface area out of an otherwise unusable hovercraft," said Schramer.

This, Schramer says, is the critical innovative part of the Hovertoon.

"The whole premise behind the Hovertoon is the rotating

pontoons. That's not been done before, and that gains 50 percent more surface area which translates right into lift. And when you pull the pontoons back under it's just like a pontoon [boat]. It can be trailered like a pontoon [boat]," said Schramer.

Those pontoons rotate 135 degrees out when the craft becomes a hovercraft.

Over the years Schramer said that the reach of his Hovertoon has made it to some far corners of the world, and he gets phone calls from time to time from people wanting to know more about the watercraft to see if it will work for their specific purpose.

"I get some strange requests. One of them was from a guy in Morocco, they were looking at it for some humanitarian work," said Schramer.

And then another call came from Kazakhstan.

"The last one I got was from Kazakhstan. There's oil fields out there, the northern Caspian Sea. There's very shallow water out there, a lot of marshes and stuff and they need to transport stuff," said Schramer.

The caller was looking for something very large, though, "more like a barge" according to Schramer.

Though he's not sure exactly how the people come across the Hovertoon, Schramer does have information out there on YouTube, and figures people come across his videos when they're looking for something regarding hovercrafts and trying to see if there's something that will fit their needs.

The Hovertoon is also known in boating circles, and has been featured in boating magazines.

Always the innovator, Schramer continues to improve on the Hovertoon.

Recently he made some design changes to the skirt, and Oshkosh Tent and Awning will be producing it off of a Computer Assisted Design (CAD) system.

The winners of the Wisconsin Innovation Awards will be announced at a ceremony on Tuesday, October 8, at the Memorial Union in Madison.



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LEFT: A SMALL PROTOTYPE of the Hovertoon rests in Schramer's workshop while the full scale model sits just a few feet away. Schramer has been tweaking the design for years and holds patents on some of the properties of the watercraft. RIGHT: THE INNOVATIVE PART of Schramer's Hovertoon comes from its rotating pontoons. When the boat turns into a hovercraft, the pontoons rotate 135 degrees up to the side of the boat creating more surface area for the airboat's lift.