

FEATURE SECTION

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LEFT: DICK SCHRAMER'S HOVERTOON won the People's Choice award on Wednesday, October 9, at the Wisconsin Innovation Awards. Schramer's creation earned the award when nominees and guests present at the awards ceremony were asked to vote on the most innovative product. Schramer's invention is part hovercraft, part pontoon boat and can make easy transitions between land and water. RIGHT: RUSS KUEHN has helped Schramer with his Hovertoon over the years, with everything from transporting it to events and working with the everyday process of assembly.

Schramer's Hovertoon wins People's Choice at Wisconsin Innovation Awards

By Paul Wiegel

Each year, the Wisconsin Innovation Awards (WIA) honors businesspeople, inventors, manufacturers, and entrepreneurs at the Wisconsin Innovation Awards.

The Awards are sponsored by a variety of Wisconsin businesses and institutions, including American Family Insurance, Wipfli, and the University of Wisconsin system.

Berlin resident, Dick Schramer, was nominated in the Manufacturing category for his Hovertoon.

Schramer's invention is part pontoon boat, part hovercraft.

The Hovertoon was nominated in the Manufacturing division of the WIA.

Though Schramer's Hovertoon didn't win in his category, he did receive the 2024 People's Choice honor which was chosen from among all the entries.

Schramer attended an awards ceremony on Wednesday, October 9 in Madison at the University of Wisconsin campus and was honored with 31 other finalists.

There were over 200 nominees, and eight winners were chosen.

Categories included Agriculture, Biotechnology, Business to Business, Health, Manufacturing, Nonprofit, Software and People's Choice.

A panel of 14 judges chose the winners, though the People's Choice award was chosen by those in the nominee pool.

"They put a big QR code up on the screen and it took you to a site to vote," said Schramer.

Though he was not expecting it, Schramer's Hovertoon came

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out on top.

"It was kind of exciting, really. There were a couple of hundred people there. The finalists, judges, and guests ... it was a nice evening," said Schramer.

Schramer said that the ceremony included brief informational videos on each entry.

"Innovation is the focus. Recognizing those that have unique ideas in different fields," said Schramer.

The winner in the Manufacturing category was SixLine Semiconductor, which makes carbon nanotubes for wireless semiconductors.

"I got beat out by a pretty good entry. I give them credit," said Schramer.

Schramer's Hovertoon 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 for the craft to transition between the two types of floatation.

A pontoon boat that can climb right up out of the water might seem like something out of a science fiction movie, and it certainly caught the eyes of those looking at nominees that are truly innovative.

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

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.

This allows for more surface area and is the critical innovative part of the Hovertoon.

Schramer estimates that the rotating pontoons create 50 percent more surface area, which translates directly to lift.

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

Other participants at the awards ceremony must have recognized the value and innovative thinking that the Hovertoon represents, and Schramer's People's Choice award is evidence of that.

Schramer is quick to point out that he didn't get there alone.

Schramer has been refining his design for years, and a friend, Russ Kuehn, has been helping him along the way.

"While I was building it, he's been right there the whole time. You can't do it all yourself, you always need an extra set of hands, and he was right there," said Schramer.

"He's been my wingman for quite a while. It's been a fun adventure," said Schramer.



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DICK SCHRAMER (left) and Russ Kuehn hold the People's Choice Award that Schramer won at the Wisconsin Innovation Awards. The award, in the shape of a light bulb, was handed out at an October 9 ceremony in Madison. Schramer was delighted to receive the award for his Hovertoon.