

# JOURNAL TRIBUNE

## NEWS

### Waterboro lands the Ripsaw

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#### *Tank manufacturing company to move its operations*

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WATERBORO — Howe and Howe Technologies, the Eliot-based company that designs and manufactures unmanned tanks like the Ripsaw and other ground vehicles, is moving to Waterboro.

Geoff Howe, who owns the company with his twin brother Michael, said Howe and Howe Technologies plans to start moving into the former Architectural Skylights building on Route 202 next week. The move is expected to be gradual and complete by the end of the year.

"We're dotting the I's and crossing the T's," said Howe Thursday. "We hope to start moving in Monday."



Howe and Howe Technologies, the Eliot-based designers and manufacturers of unmanned and manned ground vehicles like the Ripsaw, for military and other applications, is moving its operation to Waterboro. In this file photo from July 2008, Brothers Geoff and Michael Howe show the Ripsaw to Sen. Susan Collins. (Journal Tribune File Photo)

News of the move comes as the U.S. Senate Thursday approved the Defense Authorization Bill, which includes \$2.5 million for Howe and Howe Technologies to weaponize the Ripsaw unmanned ground vehicle platform. The bill has been sent to President Barack Obama for his signature. The award would be the third for the company since it began operations in 2006.

The move is welcome news to Waterboro officials, who have been trying to market the former skylight manufacturing building since it was vacated one year ago when the owners moved their operations to Sanford.

"This is a huge, phenomenal event," said Waterboro Town Planner Tom Ursia, who worked to attract the company to Waterboro. "All the right ingredients are here: Two brothers with phenomenal ingenuity, they're immensely entrepreneurial, full of energy, patriotic. They love Maine and now they love Waterboro. Look at where we are in terms of economic depreciation in the region. What a boost for the town of Waterboro."

"We're very, very excited," said Howe. "And the people in Waterboro have been an absolute pleasure to deal with."

The Howes, who have been operating their company from a location in Eliot, have been searching for new space for more than a year in order to consolidate design, manufacturing and testing. Their Eliot space is in a business park with no room for testing. That, said Howe, has meant anytime workers want to perform field tests, they must load the vehicle on a trailer and drive an hour north to a Lebanon gravel pit.

"We needed a large building and land for test driving," said Howe. "Finding that location in southern Maine has been tough. We wanted to stay in Maine no matter what."

Several communities were explored, said Howe, but Waterboro had the right location. The 50,000-

square-foot facility on Route 202 comes with nine acres of land – ample space for the company to test the Ripsaw and other vehicles. The Howes also manufacture the Badger, billed as the world's smallest armored all-terrain vehicle and used by police tactical teams, and the Subterranean Rover, used for personnel transport in coal and precious metal mining operations.

The company demonstrated the Ripsaw to Sen. Susan Collins in July 2008. The unmanned, tracked tank is remote controlled from as far away as six miles. The brothers said the MS-1 Ripsaw is a good fit for military applications, in helping to retrieve injured soldiers from a battlefield or used to determine if roadside bombs are lurking nearby.

Currently, Howe and Howe Technologies employs a staff of 15, but are advertising for welders and fabricators for the Waterboro facility. Howe said the number of people hired will depend on the workflow.

"When the contracts come in, we hire as needed," said Howe.

His sister-in-law, marketing manager Tracy Shejen, said the company has orders for four Subterranean Rovers due for delivery at the end of March.

"We're tickled pink," said Town Administrator Nancy Brandt of the news. "This is a great opportunity for the town. It is exciting to have a Maine-based family business on the cutting edge of technology locate here in Waterboro and be providing jobs."

"It's great news," said Board of Selectmen Chairman Dennis Abbott. "We're thrilled to see a company with this huge opportunity come into town. To see the building occupied excites us."

Abbott said the move to Waterboro by Howe and Howe Technologies opens up opportunity for related companies to proliferate.

The Howes' plan is to first lease the structure, with a view to a purchase.

Ursia said he will talk with the Howe brothers about the possibilities of applying for Pine Tree Zone certification and other incentives.

The Howe brothers, who hail from North Berwick, have been tinkering from an early age. The brothers, now 35, graduated from Kent's Hill School. Michael went on to Bowdoin College and worked as a financial advisor by day, and with his brother developed the first Ripsaw, along with other vehicles, at night.

Geoff attended University of Maine for two years before deciding college wasn't for him and began working in a water treatment plant. In 2006, the two opened their business in Eliot.

Television viewers will soon have a chance to see Howe and Howe Technologies on the Discovery Channel. While air dates are not yet certain, the Discovery Channel has been filming the company for months, including a stint in Waterboro.

Selectman Gordon Littlefield said the move puts Waterboro in the spotlight. Howe and Howe Technologies, he said, is a winner, both for private industry and the military.

"They provide a vital service to the military in saving lives," he said.

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