

Alachua Company Makes Green Device to Heat Water

By Larry Behnke

Located in Alachua's old Copeland Sausage plant, the Green Lantern company has a product that saves water, saves energy and saves money. And it is made right here in Florida.

Why haven't we heard of it?

The product, Eco-Aqua®, uses an efficient way to heat water from the waste heat of an air conditioner. Glenn and Mara Blumberg own the innovative Alachua company. They continue getting inquiries from other countries about their product, while our representatives have been slow in returning their phone calls. Someone should be paying attention to this clean green scene.

Eco-Aqua® works by thermosiphoning. There are no moving parts, but for the flow of water. Heat from an AC is piped through a device that transfers the heat to water for use in homes and businesses. There is no pump, no electricity and no motor. The device also lets the AC run more efficiently and extends its life. The water in the system will stay hot for 24 hours after the AC is turned off.

For use without an AC, in northern climates or during wintertime here, the device can be connected to a solar collection unit.

A display in the Blumberg's office shows an Eco-Aqua® unit using an ordinary hot water heater tank, "But the tank does not need to be plugged in," Glenn said. Water from the hottest part of the tank is used first, so there is less running of the faucet and wasting water while waiting.

It all began when Glenn was visiting a friend who showed him a heat recovery unit and his hot water heater that had never been plugged in. He looked at the base, saw the name Dinh, and realized who it was.

Glenn spoke fondly of his friend Khanh Dinh who invented the technology in the 1980s and operated a factory just south of Mebane Middle School for many years.

"Khanh installed 50 of these systems in Gainesville over the years," Glenn said. "And they are still in operation."

Glenn has also owned (for 40 years) a company called Metalloy Industries Inc., which had supplied Dinh with pipes and plumbing materials. That is when they first met. When Dinh left Florida and sold Heatpipe Technology to a national company, he retained the rights to the device that the Blumbergs are now producing.

Khanh Dinh has not only recently returned to the United States, but he is back in his old heat pipe factory, now working on LED lighting and batteries.

The Blumbergs are emphatic about keeping jobs in this country. Most of the manufacturing of Eco-Aqua® is done in a Jacksonville factory. “Also, all our manufacturing equipment is made in the USA,” Mara said.

She noted that their investment of a half million dollars has cut production time considerably. Whereas it once took Dinh five to six hours to build a device, it now takes 12 minutes.

The total cost of an Eco-Aqua® system is around \$1,400, but payback time averages a year and a half. “Once it’s installed,” Glenn said, “There is no further service.” Water heaters typically account for a quarter of a home’s energy use, so that money will be saved.



Mara and Glenn Blumberg talk about the benefits of Eco-Aqua, with, front row, Troy Adams and Todd Martin from Clay Electric Co-op; and with Representative Dennis Baxley and his Executive Secretary, Lorri Silveri.

In the past, such innovative products have not always performed as well as hoped for. The Blumbergs have solved this problem by selling Eco-Aqua® systems only to those who take their installation course. Santa Fe College professor Art Grant teaches this course at the Alachua office. Several installers have been trained and more than 30 units have already been installed. The potential is strong for expansion of Eco-Aqua® system sales, which would result in more jobs being created, all within the U.S.

Glenn and Mara began their company in a home office and are happy to have expanded into their present building. They are passionate about providing greener products to save energy and resources.

“I’ve always wanted to do something to help the planet, to make things better for our children,” Glenn said about Eco-Aqua®. “This is our legacy.”

The Blumberg’s persistence and work by marketing director Russ Augspurg have recently begun seeing the results of getting the word out about Eco-Aqua®. In June, Representatives Keith Perry (District 24), Dennis Baxley (Dist. 23) and Charles Chestnut have shown an interest and visited the company. In July Elizabeth Porter is scheduled to visit. They would do well to promote this Florida-based product that can have such a positive effect on saving water, energy and money.

A portion of all Eco-Aqua® profits goes to benefit international energy, water and wildlife conservation. “We want to give back too,” Mara said. “We’re all in this together.”