Newberry County boat-makers making a bigger splash

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When Falcon Boats began operation in 2015, president Stephen Waller told the Columbia Regional Business Report his independent startup took a "fund-as-we-go approach."

The custom boat-builder started with a $2.5 million investment at a building off Wilson Road in Newberry and a single F-215 model.

Now Falcon Boats offers six models and plans to unveil another at the 2020 Bassmaster Classic in Birmingham, Ala., in March.

Since inception, the company has made more than 250 boats, and in 2018 reported a production growth rate of 141.6%.

As of November, the company has matched its 2018 production numbers with two months of production left in 2019.

"Not bad for two country boys," said Lisa Waller, Stephen's wife, who uses her Ph.D. in educational psychology and research as the company's director of marketing and sales.

The company now employs 30 people at its Newberry shop. Tim DePriest and Jimmy Metts are co-owners along with Stephen Waller.

"A lot has changed since 2015," Lisa Waller said. "We continue to make upgrades on our building and on things to make our process even better as we continue to grow."

Waller said Falcon Boats has a network of 25 dealers throughout the Southeast and Ohio, Missouri and Illinois.

All boats are made to order and shipped to dealers, which she said enables the company to offer a variety of options and upgrades while allowing dealers to get the boat they want instead of having to select from available stock.

"The dealers can pick the colors, how they want the colors," she said. "They can pick the electronics that they're interested in.

"Obviously, we have standard equipment, and we offer a lot of really great options as standard features on our boats. We don't strip them down. We try to create a boat we think a lot of anglers are going to be interested in and offer that as standard."

Waller said because Falcon Boats operates on a shoe-string budget, social media and relationships with professional anglers have been beneficial to the company's success.

One of those pros is Prosperity native Anthony Gagliardi, who won the Fishing League Worldwide Forrest Wood Cup on Lake Murray in 2017 and has more than $2.1 million in FLW career winnings.

Stephen Waller introduced himself to Gagliardi at his son's football game, where Gagliardi's daughter was a cheerleader.

"Just having that hometown vibe to it made it all that more appealing, and makes it all that more special to me, now that I get to see them growing and expanding and accomplishing what they wish to accomplish in this industry," Gagliardi, the 2006 FLW Tour Angler of the Year, said.

As Falcon Boats becomes more recognized, Waller thinks some of the company's appeal lies in the fact that it's a small, family-focused business.

"We've grown completely organically," she said. "We're proud of the followers that we have because we feel like they are following us because they want to follow us and they're interested in our product."

"We're okay being small," she said. "We just hope we can continue to do this for some time and continue to grow."

Lisa Waller
Director of marketing and sales, Falcon Boats

Later that week, Gagliardi, who was using a Ranger boat, showed up at the shop.

"Anthony came by the shop a few days later and said, 'I just really feel like I need to help you guys out. You all are local. You're just a guy out here watching your kid play ball. I really think I need to help you out,'" Lisa Waller said.

That began a relationship that helped get the word out nationally about Falcon Boats.

Gagliardi is now one of 10 professional anglers using and promoting Falcon boats.

"Anthony has been very instrumental in helping to bring other pros on board, and he's become a friend to us," Waller said.

Gagliardi, the 2006 FLW Tour Angler of the Year, said it's been a pleasure working with Falcon Boats.

"To be able to carry that product with me to the rest of the country where we fish and everybody sees it and they hear the story about where they're from and how close they are to me, that meant a lot to me," he said.

"Just having that hometown vibe to it made it all that more appealing, and makes it all that more special to me, now that I get to see them growing and expanding and accomplishing what they wish to accomplish in this industry," he said.