



Scott Renne built two businesses on high-quality electrical parts for boats and trucks. (Photo courtesy of Blue Sea Systems/Scott Lechler)

## Scott Renne set sails based on his heart—and made port as world's best retail supplier

By Steve Hortegas

Scott Renne sailed into his future during a two-year ocean voyage around the Pacific. It was during this adventure that he realized electrical equipment on boats was of poor quality. Renne then moved forward, into the market of high-quality electrical products.

Renne is the founder, president and shareholder of Blue Sea Systems, an organization that manufactures electrical system equipment for marine and specialty emergency vehicles, as well as alternative energy and industrial applications. More than

1,000 products, mostly made in Bellingham, are distributed to 44 countries. Last year, Blue Sea Systems earned a title as the nation's best supplier.

"I followed my heart to start a business doing what I loved," said Renne.

His father was a commercial fisherman, and Renne spent 10 years as an executive at the world's largest retailer of marine equipment.

Founded in 1992, Renne has grown annual revenues to \$25 million with 22 consecutive years of profitability.

"[Whatcom County is] a fabulous home for Blue Sea Systems – high quality of life, diverse and talented workforce, and wonderful

mix of community, technical and university education." Renne said.

The company employs about 75 people locally, with an additional 30 short-term contract employees expected for 2014. That's more than \$5 million in payroll injected into the local economy. Renne also provides millions of dollars in positive U.S. trade balance, with some \$15 million to American suppliers.

But it's a culture of continuous "Customer Experience" improvement that drives success.

"We treat every employee as a colleague and every customer as a friend," Renne said. "Every action we take is in pursuit of improving our performance based on Ten Elements of the Customer Experience."

Element 10 states: Products are supported by Blue Sea Systems as long as the customer owns them."

The greatest satisfaction in business and life can be attributed to how one handles adversity, Renne said. His decision in 2003 to issue a voluntary recall could have bankrupted the company. It cost more than \$1 million, but customers appreciated the decision and worked with the company to minimize cost.

**"If you are inclined to be an entrepreneur, and to grow and be successful at a company, I rank that as one of those defining aspects of life. Right up there with having children and the love of your life."**

"It was better than any team building exercise we could have devised," Renne said. "Every challenge we have faced since then has seemed trivial."

Employees rallied to notify



owners and replace products scattered across the world's oceans. The company emerged with a stronger management team and tremendous good will from customers.

"If you are inclined to be an entrepreneur, and to grow and be successful at a company, I rank that as one of those defining aspects of life. Right up there with having children and the love of your life," Renne said.

Renne now focuses Blue Sea Systems' philanthropy on challenges faced by young people. Renne is a father of three and said the most influential charitable efforts are obtained by directing resources to those in the younger years of life.

"Following my heart and doing what I loved gave me the energy I needed in the early years of struggle," Renne said, "and has made me eager to get to work every morning for 22 years."

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AADC Automation	40.6¢	26.5¢	69.1¢
3-Digit Automation	40.6¢	26.5¢	63.4¢
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