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TOW TECH

A Bright Idea

Shining more light on the incident scene

By Kellie K. Speed

Like any business owner, Pete Kitt, Jr. wears many different hats. In addition to being the president of both Pete Kitt Automotive Sales and Service and Lujan USA in Camillus, NY, Kitt is a problem-solver and product-innovator/developer.

Kitt's father, Pete Kitt, Sr., started the auto repair portion of the company in the early 1950s and added towing to supplement the work in the winter. As the oldest of the six children in his family, Kitt said he became involved with the business "as soon as I could sit in the passenger seat of a tow truck."

The family business evolved over the years, one thing leading to another, Kitt

said. "Interestingly enough, we got into the air conditioning business, which led us to installing air conditioners in cars," he explained. "It seemed to fit in well with the repair business. Then we got into selling shop equipment and we became one of the companies to start building shop equipment. We put up a website and started selling locally."

That sector of the business became Lujan USA, a manufacturer and wholesaler of automotive service equipment. Pete Kitt, Sr. serves as vice-president for both companies today.

According to Kitt, his products are simply practical, not designed by an engineer thinking like an engineer. "We think from a perspective of an end-user because we've been the end-user," he

pointed out. "We see them as solutions to problems we see in this (the automotive service) business."

The Big Idea

A (literally) shining example of Kitt's philosophy is found in his recently introduced, professional-use light called the PODLight. "One day, we got an email from someone saying he had a product, but it sounded too good to be true and, when you think that, it's generally true," Kitt said. "It was a manufacturer of headlights in Spain and he was looking to expand the market domestically. Technically, it was a good product, but the marketing was poor. We did the marketing for the product and then we learned how we could make products for us, which is when we came up with the idea for the PODLight."

Over the years, Kitt had often heard operators griping about flashlights that did not work when they were needed. "Being in the towing and automotive industry, we had a lot of complaints already about lighting," Kitt said. "When a light dropped, the bulb would break or the heat from the lamp would melt and burn the plastic or your arm, the cords drag on the ground and track grease and when you're walking, the

ords get tangled. The headaches were numerous and obvious.”

Based on his own towing experience and after visiting trade shows, Kitt decided this was an opportunity he could not pass up. “We thought it was a good idea to take an LED, alter the design and make a practical light, for not just towers, but anyone with the need of a light,” he said.

Designed For Duty

The name, explained Tim Welch, Lujan USA's sales manager, came from the PODLight's form. “It's the way it's shaped,” he said. “It looks like a pod.” The PODLight is cordless and can be used as a work light, a flashlight, and an emergency strobe. The light, which has a suggested retail price of \$79.95, will provide eight hours of cordless illumination as a worklight, 12 hours as a flashlight, and over 48 hours as a flashing safety strobe.

With his background in towing and automotive, Kitt said he thought of features that would benefit the tower. “For example,” he said, “it has the design of a hexagon so it doesn't roll off the hood of a car. The handle is black so the dirt doesn't show up on it and the end cap is yellow so it reminds the tower if he has placed it down somewhere. The lens is made of polycarbonate so if you drop it on a concrete floor, the bulbs won't break.”

The PODLight's 360-degree repositionable collar is magnetic and is equipped with a nylon hook for hanging. “The towers loved it because it eliminated a big headache for lighting. If you lift the hood, you need to hold a light and if you need to put on jumper cables, it was always difficult because you only have two hands,” Kitt noted. “Towers generally had to lie the light on the ground or hold it in their mouth like a Mag-Lite. This light is great for those nighttime annoyances.”

The PODLight also has a flash pattern, blinking twice and then pausing, making it useful for emergency situations. “Although we designed the PODLight with towers in mind, many other industries have shown interest,” Kitt said. “People in the railroad industry have told us that it solves a lot of their headaches. Otis Elevator is looking at them for their repairmen and General Motors is also looking at purchasing some for their maintenance people in their production facilities.”

Long Life Light


Kitt learned that one of the most common problems for towers was that regular flashlights never seemed to work when they were actually needed because the batteries went dead.

“The PODLight is completely rechargeable so it is always charged and available when you need to use it,” Kitt pointed out. “You can also leave it indefinitely in a lighter and not have to worry about it draining the battery of the truck. The unit has three nickel metal batteries and, when it is done charging, the built-in microprocessor shuts it off automatically, sensing that there is no more need for a charge.”

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A BRIGHT IDEA

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Kitt's tests on the PODLight have shown that a driver can leave the light plugged in in a truck over a weekend and the truck will still start on Monday. "It (the microprocessor) extends the life of the light and the batteries exponentially," he said. Durability tests also had gratifying results. "We had a 300-pound man stand on it and it didn't break," Kitt said, "so we backed a car over it." The PODLight still didn't break.

Kitt continues to look for ways to better the PODLight and increase its usefulness in a number of applications, including the arena of hurricane preparedness. "We're not shy about upgrading the product," he said.

Enthusiasm for his work keeps Kitt going. "If you don't have a passion for it," he said, "it's pointless."

Learn more about the PODLight by visiting www.lujanusa.com, emailing to podlight@lujanusa.com or call 888-576-4737. Purchase online at www.the-podlight.com.



Pete Kitt with his PODlight

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FAMILY MATTERS

Growing Up Towing

Many youngsters get hooked before they can legally tow

By Carol Hanna Branch

Rick Bays built a tow truck as a teen — and he was hooked. The business grew like his family. The company has 14 employees with five heavy-duty operators. And Bays and his wife, Linda, have six daughters and one son, Rocky. "Rocky is a mini-version of our dad," said daughter Meghan, who runs the office.

When Rocky Bays was growing up, he'd put on his boots and head out the door with his dad. Still wearing his pajamas, he didn't want to miss the action — even in the middle of the night.

A while back, Rick Bays pulled up to an accident site and told Rocky, then six or seven years old, to sit tight. Not long after that, his dad spotted Rocky standing next to some state troopers holding a flashlight and directing

traffic. "He was always a nosey kid — he had to see what's going on," said Bays, 54, owner of Speed of Light Towing in Watsonville, CA.

Junior At Work

The Bays father-and-son duo are not unique. Sam Brewer, president of the 900-member Towing and Recovery Association of America, estimates that more than 85 percent of the towing companies are family-owned. "There are a lot of second- and third-generation towers all over the country," said Brewer, who is based in Orlando, FL.

He's seen the youngsters first-hand at the Professional Wreckers of Florida tow shows in Orlando. "We had over 300 children at an Easter egg hunt here," he said. "Mama and daddy can't go to Disney World and leave the children at home."

Towing dads often carry sons to work, too. Children growing up in the towing business can revel in real-life experiences that set them on a career course early. Trucks, cranes, cars, big rigs — oh my!

Life can be filled with adventure for young towers-to-be. And that means tales to tell — in Rocky's case, a very early one. When Rocky was a toddler, his dad took him on a job. The pajama-clad boy fell asleep in the truck with the doors locked. Dad had to break into his own truck!

Starting Early

Rocky, now 21, has been riding around with his dad since he was in diapers. "It's in my blood," he said. Rocky Bays got certified in light duty at age nine and heavy duty at 10. At 16, he took out the International 4700 hook truck for the first time. "I did the standard stuff — tire changes, local tows and lockouts," he said,



Jerry Sr., Jerry Jr., Bryan (on step), and Justin Ondrick

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