



Everything Michigan

## CEO talks about fall and rebound of S2 and Tiara yachts at Zeeland Chamber of Commerce meeting

By Myron Kukla | The Grand Rapids Press

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Delbridge Langdon Jr. | The Grand Rapids Press

David Slikkers, left, CEO S2 Yachts Inc.  
Michelle Burns, center, of Heart of West Michigan United Way, and Mark L Dewitt, director of Corporate and Foundation Relations, talk Thursday at a Zeeland Chamber of Commerce gathering.

ZEELAND -- Three years ago, **S2 Yachts Inc.** experienced the best year in the company's 50-year history.

Demand for the luxury S2 and Tiara yachts and Pursuit powerboats were at a peak. The Holland company had just completed a \$14 million, 300,000-square-foot manufacturing plant at 725 E. 40th St.

"We were feeling like we were at the top of Mount Everest. Then came 2008," CEO David Slikkers said at the **Zeeland Chamber of Commerce's** annual meeting Thursday at The Colonial Clock Building.

But the company saw orders for its multi-million-dollar yachts almost disappear overnight, has laid off 700 of its 800 employees since 2008.

"We've seen tough times before, but nothing like this," said Slikkers of the privately-owned, family-operated firm.

But he sees a rebound ahead, and not just in watercraft.

In June, Slikkers' new firm, **Energetx Composites, LLC**, landed \$27.3 million in Michigan Economic Growth Authority-approved state tax credits to build mega-sized turbine blades and composite products for wind-powered

electrical generators. The spinoff expects to add 1,068 jobs.

But a hurdle for entering the market is the bulk of the wind-turbine industry is in Europe with a handful of companies.

To break in, Energetx is working on a deal with one of the European firms to manufacture blades locally.

"It is projected that 40,000 (generation) towers will be built in the next 15 years, and we're going to be part of that, " Slikkers said.

Energetx is investing \$37 million into the venture, expecting to use production space at S2's Tiara Yachts factory that has sat empty in recent months.

Slikkers hopes to start manufacturing for Energetx early next year.

The move into commercial turbine blades and Nacelles, the housing units for wind generators, may just be the start for Energetx.

The new company's base business is composites, which are rugged, lightweight, high-performance materials used to build everything from solar products to motor vehicles.

"We want to leverage our experience in composites and our history of reliability to make new products for companies and are creating divisions to address markets from military to private and commercial aircraft," Slikkers said.

"We're back climbing the mountain one step at a time."

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## THE LIST

**The Zeeland Chamber of Commerce awarded six honors at its annual meeting Thursday night:**

**Lester Hoogland Community Service Award:** City on a Hill Ministries

**Community Image Awards:**

- Lenz & Associates, Inc., renovation
- Hospice House, new construction
- Zeeland Ace Hardware, retail renovation
- Zeeland Cemetery office, new public facility construction
- Lawrence Steet Park, historic renovation