

Flupsy launch

hose fittings to either pump water in, and lower the Flupsy, or evacuate water out, and make it more buoyant. According to Wyatt, typical operating height is around 18 inches.

Crew explained, "We're more or less pumping water in and out to achieve a more desirable water level in those troughs. To keep the product happy!"

Wyatt and Crew both boasted that the submersible feature provides easier access to all parts of the vessel while it's in use, as well as allowing for float height adjustment for a changing production weight.

"It can be maintained much easier due to it being its own dry dock," said Crew. "You don't have to put it on the beach and dry dock it to maintain it, and it can be disassembled in one day."

Crew noted that's what they just did in order to move it from inside the construction facility there at the old pulp mill site to outside on top of two metal horses.

While pointing to the water paddle, Wyatt claimed that the water level and rate of circulation is a fine tune adjustment and can be synchronized with environment for max-

imum food circulation for the oysters. His theory is that there is a certain oyster seed that can be produced to work best in a specific area. He hopes to test that theory with all the adjustments his new Flupsy provides.

The rain continued to fall even harder. Wyatt shielded it with a baseball cap and looked down at the waterline ascending higher in Ward Cove and closer to ground zero. Crew walked each corner of the Flupsy and checked for slack in all the ropes.

The launch time was chosen for the high tide advantage, and there was only a few minutes left to the scheduled 3 p.m. time of launch. The plan cut feet from the drop zone height by just waiting minutes, but they also didn't want to lose the window of opportunity.

Crane operator Greg Black climbed up and into the cab of the crane and the mechanical turning of the starter was followed by the clank of the diesel engine drive. As that was a signal to start, crews launched into position. Each angle of the Flupsy had a set of eyes and rope with a pair of hands to guide it while in tote by the crane operator.

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Spectators gathered off to the side of the launch and recorded the event with cameras and phones.

The four lines went tight and the Flupsy gained height. Crane operator Black needed to do about a half rotation to get it over the water and clear of the dock. The Flupsy cleared the dock wall and descended into the waters of Ward Cove.

Once it was afloat, Crew climbed aboard and cut lose the lines to the crane. The Flupsy was in a free float with only a couple hand-held ropes as a mooring. Wyatt climbed aboard with a bottle of champagne. The two walked to the bow and said their thanks. Wyatt cracked the bottle over the front of his Flupsy calling an end to the ceremony.

Spectators congratulated Wyatt and Crew for their accomplishment and bid Wyatt good luck on his journey home.

One of those spectators was Sea Grant Alaska Marine Advisory Agent Gary Freitag, who expressed his interest in the impact the Flupsy will have on the local industry, as well as his admiration of the design.

"I think it's an extremely interesting design" said Freitag. "It provides a tremendous amount of filter feed. They will grow much quicker."

Freitag also pointed out that the Flupsy is a form of sustainable farming by only using plankton from the water.

Ben Crew and Crew Enterprises is confident there is a place for this design in the Southeast Alaska aquatic farming market and anticipates building another Flupsy soon.

"It was a fun project and I look toward working with Eric to market the Flupsy to fit the growing oyster market," said Crew.

For the next three days, Wyatt prepared to make the journey from Ketchikan to Prince of Wales with a new Flupsy in tow. Just before sunrise on May 11 he left the pulp mill docks with his power troller "Das Boat," and headed out of the cove north and along the east side of Guard Island.

His oyster farm and home are both in Token Bay on the northwest side of Prince of Wales Island near the south coast of Kosciusko Island. One journey leads into another for Eric Wyatt.