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Marco Island man devises solution for slipping sea walls

By QUENTIN ROUX, Staff Writer
June 30, 2004

Deteriorating sea walls have become an all-too-real problem for Marco Island waterfront dwellers.

The island has about 200 miles of manmade canals, constructed during The Deltona Corp.'s pioneering efforts in the mid-'60s.

That era saw what would be regarded as one of the biggest earth-moving exercises in North American history.

For owners with the now-aging walls, the choice is ongoing maintenance or ultimate replacement at a cost of about \$250 per linear foot.

Until now, maintenance options have been largely confined to the "tie-back" method, which involves excavation, trenching and a concrete pour that is time-consuming and can be disruptive for owners.

But Islander Jim Timmerman believes he has patented the perfect alternative to traditional tie-back maintenance.

He has developed a technique he calls the Dynamic Seawall Maintenance System, using knowledge he says has been around for thousands of years.

"It's basically one or more giant screws," Timmerman said, "inserted hydraulically from the canal side of the wall, and which can be installed above or below the water line."

The screws are 16 feet long, weigh about 25 pounds each, and the shafts are typically 1 inch in diameter.

At preset intervals, curved helixes "burrow" the tie-backs into the soil at the rate of about 3 inches per revolution.



Quentin Roux/Staff

Jim Timmerman sizes up an integral part of his invention, a giant screw that can be hydraulically inserted through a sea wall instead of using the traditional method of excavation.



Perched on part of an installation rig, Timmerman surveys the adjustable flanges used to reinforce the sea wall at his Perrine Court home on Marco Island.



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Timmerman described the system as "dynamic" as opposed to static existing methods, in that the Dynamic Seawall Maintenance System can be adjusted on an as-needed basis.

"The other systems are known as 'dead man' support systems, and only after time would someone know if their sea wall is failing," Timmerman said.

He said his system is unobtrusive, cost competitive and, in his own case, already successful.

With the help of local engineer Martin Pinckney and marine construction expert Greg Mann, Timmerman recently installed the system on his own Perrine Court sea wall, and is due to start his first paying job in the near future.

Timmerman's own installation was pursuant to city permitting, and Mann — of Blue Marlin Marine Construction — is the first contractor licensed to install the system.

Mann is more than upbeat about the possibilities of Timmerman's invention, which was patented with the help of Maryland-based patent attorney Robert Epstein.

"I see it spreading like wildfire," Mann said. "You don't have to tear up gardens, or deal with pools built near sea walls. It's done from the water side, and there's no excavating."

Mann estimated installations for an average 80-foot wall will take about a day compared to about five days for the conventional dead-man method.

Costs run slightly higher, at around \$500 per tie-back, but the shorter installation time and not having to tear up yards, pools or docks easily negates those extra costs, he said.

Pinckney, a professional engineer and branch manager of American Engineering Consultants Inc., said the company assisted Timmerman on the pilot work, and would be available in the future for engineering services for Dynamic Seawall Maintenance System projects.

American Engineering also provides civil engineering, structural and surveying services for housing construction, septic systems and sea walls.

Timmerman, a former merchant marine captain, said his innovative idea came about because of the ongoing sea wall maintenance at his own home.

He devised the screw "earth anchor" idea from a salvage job about three years ago when he winched a grounded and damaged yacht sideways to be able to apply a patch to a hole caused by the keel pushing through.

He did it with rough calculations, an earth anchor and winching the boat over by using the halyard from the mast.



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Timmerman said other applications for his system include total wall failure.

"In these cases, it can be used to shore up adjacent good walls so that repairs can be made on the failed area," he said.

The existing shoring method is to drive pilings down next to the good wall, Timmerman said, which can cause wall portions farther down to fail in a domino effect.

As for the potential of the new system, Timmerman believes the sky's the limit.

"It's a potential worldwide market," he said, "anywhere there's concern for wall maintenance ... separating earth from water."

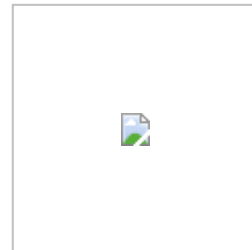
Timmerman, who is in partnership with longtime colleague Peter Crockett, has called the new company Maritime Professional Services Incorporated.

Timmerman, who is married and has one child, also runs Wholesale Communication Services on the island. It provides cable services to residential customers on Marco Island through Marco Island Cable.

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