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Los Angeles developer Bill Geary has expanded his ownership in the year-old Ocean Walk Village Shoppes and recruited California investors for the project.

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**Local success**



N-J/ David Tucker

Jim Cairns, founder of Ocean Design, holds a large connector assembled by May Gentile, background. The company produces connectors of all sizes for underwater fiber-optic and electrical cables.

**Related Web site:**

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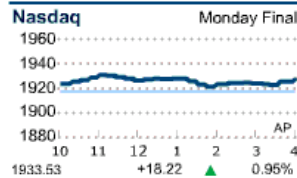
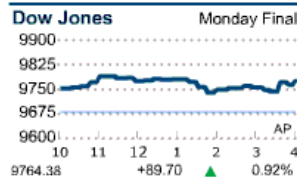
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## Hi-tech gadgets bring inventor award

By **JIM HAUG**  
Business Writer

Last update: 13 October 2003

ORMOND BEACH -- A local businessman has joined the ranks of Navy admirals and elite scientists by winning the Compass Distinguished Achievement Award.

The award recognizes individuals for their contributions to oceanography and marine technology.

Jim Cairns, the founder and principal owner of Ocean Design Inc. in Ormond Beach, has more than 30 patents on submersible electric and fiber-optic connectors.

Amos Bussman, the publisher of Compass Publications, compared the connectors to regular wall sockets, but said they were the "key enabling technology" for the offshore oil industry.

The underwater oil wells, Bussman said, could not "function without them."

The Marine Technology Society, honored Cairns during a convention in La Jolla, Calif., in September. The ceremony also coincided with the 100th anniversary of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, where Cairns earned his doctorate in marine physics in 1974.

Cairns began his career as a researcher of waves beneath the ocean surface, but, he said, "I became more interested in the hardware."

After working for Scripps and NATO in Italy, Cairns devised the means to connect and disconnect electronics and fiber optics under water. "This allowed the offshore oil industry to go into much deeper water," he said.

Originally, the offshore oil industry would send a whole control system to the ocean floor, Cairns said. As the industry grew, it needed a way to construct the control systems on the ocean floor. Each offshore oil platform supports a network of underwater wells.

Some connectors are powerful enough to provide energy for cities the size of Daytona Beach.

Because of its exclusive, patented technology, Ocean Design is vertically-integrated business, doing everything from design to manufacture and assembly. It has annual sales of \$30 million.

Ocean Design employs about 200 people. County officials have offered many incentives to keep it here, but the company is still interested in moving closer to Orlando for a greater pool of talent and closer proximity to Orlando International Airport.

A proposal to move to Orange City has fallen through, Cairns said. "2002 was just a bad year for the economy."

None of Ocean Design's customers are in Florida, he said. It may seem odd that a company that provides equipment to offshore oil industry is located in a state that's openly hostile to offshore drilling.

Cairns moved to Florida in the 1980s to be closer to his parents who had retired here. "I like the state," he said.

Ocean Design is actually his second company. He sold his first, Marine Challenger, to Lockheed in 1984. Because he signed a non-compete clause, Cairns "hibernated" for three years in Italy.

He returned to Florida in 1988 to start Ocean Design with his partner, John Folvig. He stepped down from the running the company in 1996, but is the chairman of the board and a principal designer.

Cairns lives half the year with his Italian wife, Annamarie, in a 700-year-old monastery near Urbino, Italy, which has been converted into his house.

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