

## Handling Specialty gives entertainment a lift

By Don Fraser, Standard Staff

March 9, 2011

The stages embrace a watery spectacle designed to captivate a mass audience.

Built by Handling Specialty of Grimsby inside Royal Caribbean ships the Oasis of the Seas and Allure of the Seas, they're also one-of-a-kind.

Handling Specialty has created three huge underwater lifts, two tilting diving boards and one rotating trampoline for these biggest cruise ships in the world.

Both started sailing over the past 14 months — Allure was launched in December.

"This is very high profile and very exciting," said Handling Specialty president Tom Beach, adding the devices have already been featured in a couple of documentaries, including a Discovery Channel show, *The Mighty Ships*.

"Royal Caribbean did a number of special engineering feats on these vessels ... and one big one for them was for this water show."

These systems, manufactured in Grimsby and installed at Turku, Finland, over about 18 months, form the "AquaTheatre" stage area for the largest and deepest freshwater pools at sea.

The various lifts are raised and lowered through the day to meet specific needs of each performance.

The devices are part of a water-lift niche in the entertainment world in which Handling Specialty excels.

Last year, the company finished building and installing the underwater stage lifting system for the House of Dancing Water theatre at the City of Dreams casino in Macau, China.

Altogether, these latest cruise ships and entertainment device contracts are worth almost \$30 million for Handling Specialty.

And it's not their first foray into the area.

Previously, the company had won a Guinness World Record for creating the world's largest underwater hydraulic stage at Bellagio hotel in Las Vegas for the Cirque du Soleil show O.

"On a global stage right now, I'd consider us to be the No. 1 leading supplier of underwater stage lift systems," said Beach. "We've been contacted by companies from two other countries who've seen the show in Macau."

Handling Specialty, which specializes in these major lifts, handling and motion-control devices, has about 45-50 employees.

It's working on other big projects, including vertical assembly platforms for Lockheed Martin's F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) project in the U.S.

"We're very diversified now," Beach said.

"The fact is in the entertainment industry we do now have a certain niche reputation.

"Through all of this, the No. 1 thing is about innovation in each market sector," he said. "If you don't innovate, you kind of get left behind."

[dfraser@stcatharinesstandard.ca](mailto:dfraser@stcatharinesstandard.ca)