

## Center for Coastal Conservation

CCC Member Profile:

### **IF YOU DON'T KNOW KING PLASTIC, LOOK AROUND YOUR BOAT**

Central Florida Manufacturer Employs 145 Workers

(First in a Series)

by Jeff Angers

**North Port, Fla., Nov. 13, 2015** -- You've probably never heard of CCC members Jeff King, King Plastic or King Starboard.

But take a look at the bow of your fishing boat: check out the rod holders under the gunnels; try the built-in tackle storage boxes, your bait-cutting boards and the swim platforms. Go below deck and see the entryway doors into the cabin -- or the ski storage hatches in the floor.

If your boat was made before the mid-1980s, most of those parts would have been made of teak -- and like most anglers, Jeff King hated having to refinish the teak on his dad's fishing boat. Today, because of three generations of the King family and their 145 full-time employees, they're made of durable lightweight plastic made at King's 150,000 square-foot manufacturing plant in North Port, Florida.



Jean Vales, who just celebrated his 20th year with King Plastic. Like 455,000 other Americans, he owes his job to recreational fishing.

The material stands up to the sun and salt, it's lightweight -- and, unlike teak, doesn't require the nearly constant elbow grease of continuous refinishing.

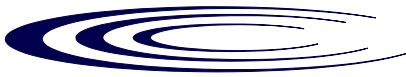
Jeff King's father began King Plastic in nearby Venice, Florida in 1968, turning out industrial-size plastic sheets of varying sizes, colors and strengths. Plastic fabricators cut and shape the sheets into everything from polymer lawn furniture to snow plows -- even synthetic ice-skating rinks.



Jeff King (l) and his son, Charlie, at King Plastics' North Port, Florida factory.

King Starboard -- the company's marine product family -- started in the mid-1980s, when Jeff and his father noticed that the fish-cutting boards that were being used at the Venice docks were made of plywood.

"They were nasty!" Jeff recalls. "The wood absorbed the fluids, the guts -- everything."



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King and his dad were already manufacturing cutting boards for commercial use, the kind used by food processing facilities and supermarkets. They tried placing one of their plastic cutting boards on top of the plywood fish-cleaning tables. It was an improvement, but the brutal Gulf of Mexico sun destroyed it within months.

After a series of experiments with UV stabilization and color combinations that wouldn't fade, the Kings settled on a combination that looked good, held up to rough treatment and wouldn't deteriorate under the sun and the salt of the docks.

"Then we took a look at the boats," King remembers. "We wondered if, with different strengths and weights, we could replace the teak on the rod-holders, step-treads and the swim platforms with our polymer sheet. We hand-tooled the first ones, using the teak parts as templates -- but it worked great, looked great and held up. We loved it."

Still in his 20s, the young manufacturer started showing the products around to distributors, and his mom came up with the name -- "King Starboard." Other versions included "King Starlight XL," a lighter, more economical product.

"One thing led to another and we built a whole family of products built around the marine industry -- and we eventually replaced most of the teak and plywood on fishing boats."

Today, King Plastic is now a third-generation family business: Jeff's two sons both work in the business, his older son, Steven, 27, at the company's warehouse operation in southern Oregon and his younger son, Charlie, 26, at the North Port plant.



King Plastic employee Shawn Gordon prepares finished products for shipment.

Some of their factory workers, King notes, have been working for the company for more than 20 years.

When you hear the words "recreational fishing," the last thing most folks think about is a factory job -- but thanks to you and America's 11 million saltwater anglers, King Plastic's 145 employees are just a few of the 455,000 Americans who owe their jobs to recreational saltwater fishing.

They're part of a \$26.5 billion industry -- one that is growing right alongside the increasing popularity of recreational fishing.

Altogether, companies like King Plastic generate \$20.5 billion in income and contribute \$70 billion to the U.S. economy.

That's why it's so important that the recreational fishing community make its voice heard in the halls of Congress. Recreational fishing is more than a hobby for 11 million Americans: for the workers at King Plastic (and in thousands of other small businesses), it's a matter of bread and butter.



King Plastic Corporation