

Engineering firm gets boost from 'Master and Commander'

By Sean Wolfe
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"Master and Commander" may be taking a beating at the box office from "Elf," but it's been great publicity for local engineering firm Concept Systems Inc.

Last year the Albany-based systems integrator scored the contract to animate the 60-ton vessel that serves as a moving set for the 20th Century Fox seagoing epic "Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World," starring Russell Crowe.

It was a departure for Concept Systems, which typically finds most of its work making automated gear for lumber mills and food processing plants.

According to Concept Systems co-owner Ed Diehl, while the firm didn't get its name in the credits for its work, it did make a profit on the deal, and now looks forward to working on another film.

"We're still in the early stages," Diehl said. "Talks are going on with the same production company that did 'Master and Commander.' It's for another firm involving motion control - one of our specialties - but that's as much as I can say."

While Diehl said he doesn't think showbiz work will become his firm's core business, he said the fact it has worked in movies has opened a lot of doors.

"We've had lots of 'warm fuzzies' from companies we do business with or are trying to do business with," Diehl said.

"A Portland company we'd never spoken to before called us up and wanted to talk to us about a job they wanted us to bid involving automating a chemical process. I think the exposure has added to our credibility."

Diehl also said Concept Systems was seeing extra business for the first quarter of 2004, a period that's usually associated with a slowdown in business.

"We're definitely hitting our target of \$5 million in revenues for this year. And there's a lot of business out there we're booking for early next year. I think this is the year we're not going to see a first-quarter slump, and that's a very good feeling," Diehl said.