

## **Don Arney BSc'73**

Photos courtesy Gerry Friesen



As British Columbia's worst fire summer in memory comes to a close, we've become used to seeing television footage of firefighting helicopters carrying bright orange bags full of water.

Many of us don't realize that these Bambi Buckets have only been around for 20 years and were developed here in Delta by an SFU grad. I talk to Bambi Bucket inventor Don Arney, founder and chief executive officer of SEI Industries Ltd., which has been churning out Bambi Buckets as fast as it can all summer.

### **How did you come up with the concept of the Bambi Bucket?**

I was marketing another product when I met with a supplier whose business wasn't doing very well and I offered to help. Out in the storage area of his plant he had some dusty old lift bags designed for underwater construction and salvage, so I said I'd try to bring in some business for him. It turned out to be a roaring success and I started to realize how efficient these bags were. I then realized that with the addition of a few systems I would have a totally new type of heli-bucket for forest fire fighting. I invented the required new systems in one evening.

### **Was it an immediate success?**

It took 18 months to develop into something that would work; we did a demonstration for Okanagan Helicopters and they decided on a joint venture with us in 1982. In 1983 we went into commercial production. We had the right product at the right time – it was a case of the market pulling in the product, rather than us pushing it into the market.

#### How did you establish your worldwide markets?

Word-of-mouth and trade shows. We are in 114 countries and control 95 percent of the world market. The Bambi Bucket is the world standard. Our unique valve system permits the bucket to be filled within 50 seconds from a water source no more than 30 centimetres deep.



**Don Arney with his old helicopter. The Bambi Bucket is used for fighting forest fires all over the world.**

We're constantly working on new technologies, including a bucket now in use that can drop 20 tonnes of water at once from giant Russian MI 26 helicopters, rivalling the fixed wing Martin Mars water bomber. We now have over 30 other product lines in addition to the Bambi Bucket.

#### Why is it called the Bambi Bucket?

The name came about because of CBC's Bob Fortune. He interviewed me on a show about inventors and we became friends. One night over dinner he asked me what I was going to call it. I didn't want to talk

business so I said "the Bambi Bucket" – I was just being goofy. But he said it was a great name and he was relentless in pushing me to keep it.

#### Who influenced you most at SFU?

The late Glen Geen. He was head of the biology department, and what I remember most was the time he took with me when he first met me. I wasn't clear about what I was going to major in (I'd taken engineering at UBC, but found it too dry), so I went around talking to various heads of departments. He gave me more than an hour and really turned me on to biology.

#### What are your best memories of SFU?

I used do all my studying in the library, but while I was involved in course work, I was looking for the answers to a lot of the big questions in life. What I remember most is studying for an hour or so, looking out the

library window and pondering. I also learned to meditate at SFU. It was a time when a lot changed for me; it kind of got me on track and I learned what I was capable of.

#### What do you do for relaxation?

Every morning and evening I meditate and do yogic flying. I've been involved in transcendental meditation since 1970, and in 1978 I completed the transcendental meditation Sidhis program which includes yogic flying.

#### What are you reading right now?

The most recent book I've read is *Permanent Peace: How to Stop Terrorism and War – Now and Forever* by Robert Oates. It's one of the most significant books around because it details the research proving the effectiveness of yogic flying in creating world peace. **aq**

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