

age-level engineering classes, it worked. After a little fine-tuning and a patent granted later that first year, he decided to try to turn the device into a business.

He soon found a Bay area investor who loved and understood flats fishing. With some seed money, he began producing the first units in his garage. He sold them out of the back of his car, showing them to boat dealers, tackle shop owners and anglers wherever he traveled.

"I think the breakthrough came when we put them on the boats of several of the top redfish tour pro anglers," Oliverio said. "When the other tournament anglers saw what an advantage it gave them in not blowing out fish, everybody wanted one."

Oliverio said the Power-Pole makes anchoring so easy that most anglers do it a lot more often, resulting in more fish.

"Most of us get just one or two shots at a fish or a hole because the wind and the current is always moving you across the flats," he said. "With the Power-Pole, you can stop as often as you like, just at the touch of a button, and that means you fish an area a lot more thoroughly and usually catch more fish."

Apparently a lot of other anglers agree.

Oliverio has sold more than 5,000 of the devices and has some 500 dealers from Virginia through Texas. Several large boat companies, including Ranger, have made his poles available for factory installation on their boats. He has six full-time employees hard at work in a factory in west Brandon.

His plant manager, Bob Shamblin, is a high school buddy who was the first assembly worker for the fledgling company.

"We made every one of them to order at first, but now we just produce them as fast as we can and we have a hard time keeping up with demand most of the year," Shamblin said.

A waterproof remote control for the pole, invented a few years ago, has made



Tribune photos by FRANK SARGEANT

John Oliverio's company ships his Power-Pole device all over the country.



Plant manager Bob Shamblin taps home an assembly pin on a Power-Pole.

it even more popular. The control is about the size of a wristwatch. It hangs on the belt or around the neck, and makes it possible to raise or lower the pole from anywhere in the boat.

Oliverio said he also uses the pole to keep his boat secure at the dock for short stops.

"When you get used to using the pole, you can drop it down and stop your boat with the bow just a foot from the dock so

you can step right off," he said.

The Power-Pole costs \$1,400, including the remote, making it one of the more expensive devices you'll find on most flats rigs. But Oliverio said with a five-year warranty, it's a good investment.

"A lot of guys put trolling motors that cost almost as much on their boats and they don't get two years out of them in saltwater," he said. "Our dependability has just been super, and we replace the anchor rod for free if anyone ever takes off with it down and breaks it."

The limitation of the current model is that it works in depths to only 6 feet. Oliverio said an 8-foot model is going into production early next year, allowing anglers to anchor in somewhat deeper water.

"The best thing about this business is that now I can go fishing as a part of my job," Oliverio said. "We have to test our products as often as possible. Like they say, tough work but somebody has to do it."

For more information on the Power-Pole, visit www.powerpole.com.



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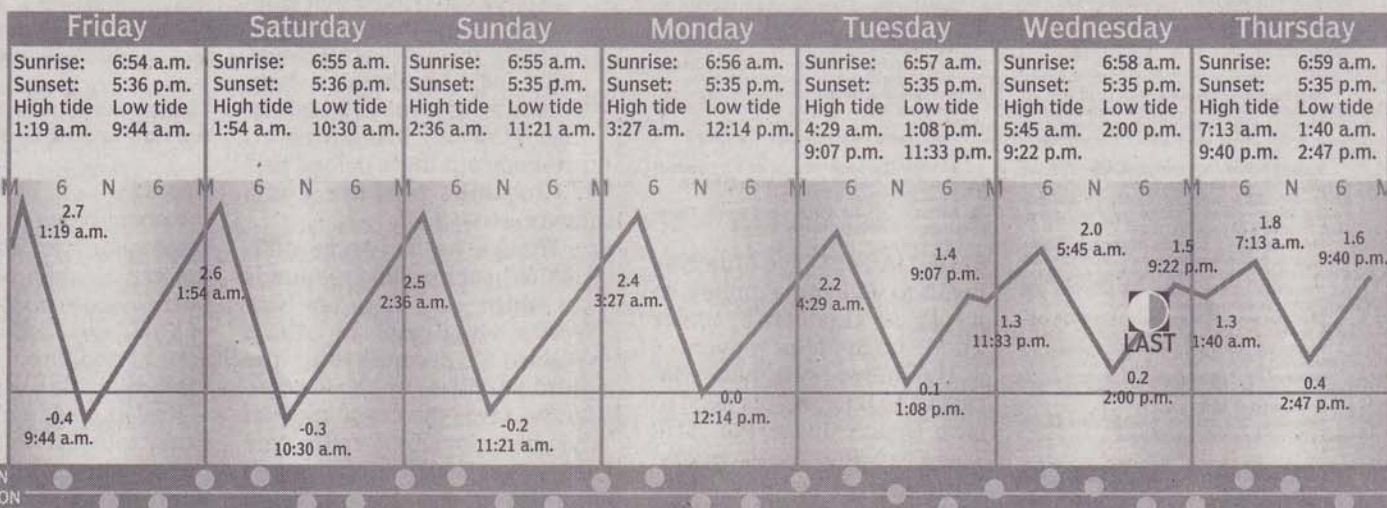
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