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Success sticks with dentist

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COUNTRY RUN — When the New Zealand *Kiwi Magic* and the American *Eagle* sliced through the Australian waters in this year's America's Cup, their hulls were coated with a slippery substance created by a Tampa dentist.

Sailors say the stuff, called Kiss-Cote, makes their boats go faster. The New Zealand team in tests last October found that Kiss-Cote made one of their slower boats faster than their fastest boat.

And that's not all. Barnacles can't stick to the stuff. Barnacles growing on a hull coated with Kiss-Cote sluff off at the touch of a finger. And it's harmless to the environment, unlike the toxic bottom paints most boaters use today.

"When you take a boat out of the water, you can take a cloth and wipe it back to the original finish," says Alan Brown, who directs product development for the Miami Cigarette Racing Team, the company that built the original cigarette boats.

But Dr. Keith Kent didn't know all that when he stumbled on the formula about four years ago in Buffalo.

"I'm not a sports fan and a year ago I didn't know the first thing about the America's Cup, and all of a

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sudden I'm staying up until 3 in the morning watching who's winning these stupid boat races," Kent says.

Now, the 35-year-old bearded dentist thinks his company, Kiss-Cote Inc., will eventually make billions of dollars a year. He spends his time talking to hundreds of companies interested in the wonder gel for a multitude of possible uses — improving car finishes, making fiberglass waterproof, even sending children sliding faster down amusement park water slides.

Once, his wife Renee spilled some on a piece of cement, and they found they had discovered a way to waterproof cement. Water still beads instantly on a square of cement that was treated with Kiss-Cote a year ago.

Another time, after they had put it on their car windshield, a wiper broke in a rain storm. "I could not believe that I could see," Mrs. Kent recalls. "The water just flies right off."

As Kent sits in his Country Run home, dressed in jeans and sandals, he says he never expected to be a businessman. In Buffalo, he was a dentist-researcher, well-known in his field but unaccustomed to publicity and attention.

"I'm not a businessman, and originally I wanted to sell it (Kiss-Cote) to a DuPont or somebody like that and let them fly with it," he says.

But Kent and his wife have a dream. And they hope the new company will bring them the money to build it.

"Ultimately, I'd like to have this research-rehabilitation facility that is self-sufficient," he says. "My dream is to have it on an island off the coast where the family can come and be in a resort with their terminally ill relative while they are going through all this trauma."

It was while working with cancer patients at the Roswell Park



DR. KEITH KENT

Memorial Institute in Buffalo that Kent discovered Kiss-Cote. At the time, he was making artificial eyes, noses and parts of faces for former cancer patients.

The problem was that the artificial parts were held on with book-binding cement, which was too harsh for the patient's skin, and Kent was trying to find a better material.

First, "I literally stumbled across a way to make the material itself sticky," he says. From that, it was only a few steps to Kiss-Cote, which has the unique ability to adhere to a surface, yet be slippery on the outside.

Other materials, like Teflon "are dangerous to work with. They're flourinated hydrocarbons, and they're dangerous to the environment," Kent says. In addition, "to get the stuff to stick, you have to go through these very sophisticated etching and bonding processes. The big thing about what we've been able to do is to take these nonstick materials and make them stick to things without going through the fancy chemistry."

That means a boater can wipe it on the bottom of his boat with his finger or a cloth, and it will work. Or someone can wipe it on their dentures so they can more easily chew gum, or on their car so the bugs don't stick.

But Kent still wasn't thinking about starting a company to sell

the stuff until he had an accident in Ecuador while he was teaching with an American medical team in 1985.

"It was on the equator. It was very hot. It was a Third World country without any of the hoods and things you're supposed to work with with these dangerous chemicals and the stuff was evaporating in my face. I just overexposed myself to the wrong kind of chemicals," Kent said.

It caused him to become overly sensitive to any kind of chemical, even nail polish, and it meant he had to leave dentistry.

That's when he and his wife decided to start KISS, or Kent Integrated Scientific Systems. For the past year, the Kents have been selling the stuff to hundreds of

companies that may use it in their products or give them an endorsement.

"We've had a lot of people that want to buy it to use, but we haven't found the right deal with the right people yet," Kent says.

But what he finds most frustrating is dealing with companies who spend more time trying to figure out his secrets than testing his product.

"We've had companies that have had Kiss-Cote for a year and a half, and all they've been trying to do is figure out what we're doing," Kent says.

"And they call us up and tell us they can't figure it out," adds his wife.

Don't bother asking. Kent isn't about to tell.