

## AquaMotion's genesis: A chance meeting with John Hazen White Sr.



Hans Kuster stands on an interior balcony of his AquaMotion Company in Warwick, overlooking a modern manufacturing floor. At an age where most of his peers have retired or others are in the twilight of their careers, Kuster is still driven to undertake new projects.

At AquaMotion he spent a decade researching and experimenting, bringing to market a recirculation system that won a major innovation award earlier this year at a Chicago trade show.

He's proud of his business successes, of his nearly 50 years of marriage to his wife, Ellen, of his daughter, Heidi, and thankful of his successful battle with cancer more than a decade ago. Much of it he attributes to fate — “a lot of things in life are fate,” he says, but a lot, he concedes, is also about hard work, commitment and preparation.

Fate, perhaps, that he was born three years before the outbreak of World War II, in a nation, Switzerland, poised for an invasion that never came.

Fate, that he met John Hazen White Sr., owner of Taco, one of Rhode Island's premier companies, on what turned out to be a three-day flight from Zurich to America, derailed three times because of severe storms in America's Northeast.

Fate, that six months later White would return to Zurich and a company he recently purchased — offering Kuster a job that would change the direction of his life.

And fate, of course, that business brought him to Detroit, where he would meet Ellen.

**In St. Gall, a city** in eastern Switzerland, he was brought up in his early years by his mother, as his father was preparing to defend his country.

“My dad, he was behind an artillery gun from 1939 to 1945,” he says, “waiting for the Germans to come ... they never came. During the war everyone was united; every adult male was in the service. All the males had automatic weapons and 100 rounds to get them to your assembly place. Within 24 hours the Swiss could put together a half-million-member military.”

With Germany and Italy on its borders, Switzerland maintained its neutral status, even though Adolf Hitler had drawn up a plan to invade Switzerland. Switzerland remained neutral even as its airspace was invaded and in spite of bombings that were characterized by Americans as accidental, including Schaffhausen on April 1, 1944, near the German border, a bombardment that killed 40 Swiss civilians and wounded many more.

“I remember as a kid when the Americans bombed Schaffhausen,” Kuster says.

After the war, he and his family would remain in St. Gall, and he would attend Handelschule KV, a business school.

Upon graduation he went to work for the Swiss National Airline for five years, traveling the world, training airline employees in ground operations. “A fine job,” he says, “for a single guy.”

“I thought I wanted to see the world; that was my driving desire,” he says. But White visited Zurich some six months after they met aboard that endless flight, and he walked into a classroom where Kuster was teaching airline employees. He offered him a job, and Kuster's life would be changed forever.

He worked for Taco for 21 years, and then started Sparco, which he sold after 17 successful years to Honeywell, after he was diagnosed with cancer. His agreement with Honeywell was to remain a year at Sparco, and when he left he wasn't idle for long, soon beginning the research that would lead to the development of AquaMotion.