UNDERSEA ADVENTURE MARKS ONE MAN'S BOLD GAMBLE TO DESIGN AND BUILD A PRIVATE SUBMARINE FROM SCRATCH

NOVA PRESENTS *UNDERWATER DREAM MACHINE*

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26, 2006, AT 8PM ET/PT ON PBS
www.pbs.org/nova/alicia

Boston, MA — Engineering ingenuity and one man's astounding determination are at the center of a new NOVA program that follows American entrepreneur Peter Robbins as he embarks on a four-year odyssey to create his own million-dollar underwater vessel from scratch and use it to explore the sunken wrecks of German U-boats. The film captures every aspect of the submarine's progress from design to manufacturing—a daunting endeavor without the resources of a big shipyard or backing of the military. The process requires some truly innovative solutions, since parts must be scavenged or even bought off-the-shelf at business supply stores. NOVA chronicles the obstacles and successes, the sheer imagination and motivation of Robbins and his small team in bold pursuit of building the ***Underwater Dream Machine***, airing Tuesday, December 26, 2006, at 8pm ET/PT on PBS (check local listings).

Throughout his life, Peter Robbins has cultivated a passion for submarines reminiscent of the fabled Captain Nemo. As an engineer, he is fascinated by the precision of Germany's U-boat technology. As an entrepreneur, he is intrigued by the prospect of underwater tourism. NOVA's new documentary immerses viewers in Robbins's remarkable story, in which he risks everything to create the Alicia—a one-of-a-kind, privately built, six-person sub with a panoramic view—and then tests his invention with a dive into the past to uncover a piece of history.

Underwater Dream Machine delves into all of the fascinating details surrounding Alicia's genesis. Assembled from 2 million parts, at a cost of $1.5 million, Alicia's design and construction are monumentally complicated undertakings. NOVA accompanies the team whose job it is to bring to life Robbins's vision, spotlighting the inventive engineering and creative problem-solving as the project slowly takes shape in a small warehouse.

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Science Unit

125 Western Avenue
Boston, MA 02134

617.300.2000

www.pbs.org/nova

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The team members—pushed by limited funds and resources—must become creative builders: The design crew shops for seats at a business supply store; takes the engine from a truck and modifies it; and repurposes 60 forklift batteries to power the sub underwater. One of the team's biggest challenges is to create a large acrylic dome that provides a unique 180-degree view of the ocean world. The single most costly component, the dome is crucial to the submarine's viability as a tourism venture but is extremely difficult to perfect. After several marred attempts, Robbins begins to fret over whether it can ever be manufactured without flaws.

Underwater Dream Machine reveals the mounting emotional pressure on Robbins as invoices pile up, schedules are pushed back, and bankruptcy looms as a project planned for two years stretches into four. The end result is an 18 - ton, two-engine vehicle devised to dive to 300 meters and withstand pressure of twice that encountered at maximum depth.

Alicia finally steams out of England's Plymouth Harbor on an uncertain first dive to test whether the sub is operable and to embark on a potentially historic mission. Thirty-nine of Hitler's most feared weapons—the German U-boats—litter the seabed of the English Channel; Robbins hopes the Alicia will give him a chance to try and find them. He tells NOVA how he is captivated "by the technology, the stories of the people who worked in them, fought in them, and died in them."

One such gripping tale is that of U-boat veteran Rudi Wieser, who was one of the few to survive his submarine's sinking and now shares with NOVA a vivid first-hand account of his escape to the surface. Robbins invites the 81-year-old to join him on the Alicia's maiden voyage—an expedition to find Wieser's sub, the U-1195.

Join NOVA for a dive into uncharted waters on a journey to fulfill Peter Robbins' daunting lifelong dream.

Now in its 33rd year of broadcasting, NOVA is produced for PBS by the WBGH Science Unit at WGBH Boston. The director of the WGBH Science Unit and senior executive producer of NOVA is Paula S. Apsell. Major corporate funding for NOVA is provided by Google. Additional funding is provided by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the public television viewers.

NOVA is closed captioned for deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers and described for people who are blind or visually impaired by the Media Access Group at WGBH. The descriptive narration is available on the SAP channel or stereo TVs and VCRs. Underwater Dream Machine will be available on DVD wherever videos are sold. To order direct from WGBH Boston Video, visit shop.wgbh.org or call 800.949.8670.

Underwater Dream Machine

A DOX Production for NOVA, WGBH Boston.

Senior Executive Producer: Paula S. Apsell
Executive Producer for Context: Daniel Petry
Executive Producers for DOX Productions: Duncan Copp and David Sington

Pressrooms
pressroom.wgbh.org/nova
pbs.org/pressroom

Press contacts for NOVA
Eileen Campion
Dera, Roslan & Campion
(212) 966-4600
eileen@drcpublicrelations.com

Yumi Huh
WGBH Boston
(617) 300-4287
yumi_huh@wgbh.org

Photography contact for NOVA
Lindsay de la Rigaudiere
WGBH Boston
(617) 300-4258
lindsay_delarigaudiere@wgbh.org

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