

Wounded Warrior: Medicine Chest In A Bottle

By Frank Ruggiero

As its 17 years in business demonstrate, Wounded Warrior's popularity is anything but wounded.

Now found in 35 states, the ointment is considered "a medicine chest in a bottle," ideal for cuts, scrapes, bruises and a chest full of other skin afflictions. Despite its renown, Wounded Warrior had humble beginnings, its birth in Boone.

In the late 1980s, Red Alderman owned an herb supply company that sold to pharmaceutical and cosmetic companies. A fisherman friend in Louisiana asked Alderman what sort of herbs would soothe the cracked skin of his hands and his sore fingers. This got Alderman thinking.

"He spent about four years coming up with the formula that we use now," said Amy MacKay, Alderman's daughter and manager of Wounded Warrior. "He was giving it away just to family and friends for people with cuts, bruises, bug bites – things like that – but people were coming back and saying, 'I used it on my horse, on my dog, I gave it to my neighbor.'"

And those comments, MacKay said, would always end with, "I need some more."

Judging by the product's popularity among friends and family, Alderman began to market it, selling it to local businesses, such as Bare Essentials, Boone Drug, Mast General Store.

"And it just took off," MacKay said. "Everybody was crazy about it."

With Wounded warrior continuing to soar in popularity, Alderman eventually closed his herb business to focus solely on Wounded Warrior. Television commercials began to hit the airwaves, and residents and tourists would be sure to pick up a bottle while shopping. Tourists and second-home owners would take Wounded Warrior back home, and the ointment soon became popular in other states.

"We're now on our 17th year, and it's just been selling like crazy," MacKay said. "We have such a good customer base – they're so loyal, and they'll tell their neighbor or family member, and it just goes from there. Everybody's giving it away or ordering more."

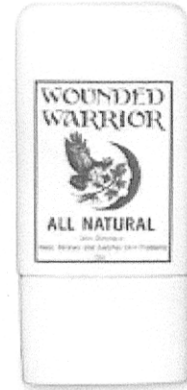
MacKay assumed management of the business five years ago, as Alderman was ready to pass the torch – or ginseng root in this case.

Though MacKay set up office in Wilmington, she owes Wounded Warrior's success to the High Country, and she said the local Eckerd's Drug reported that Wounded Warrior was the number one over-the-counter item.

"In the mountains, you'd be hard-pressed to find a store that doesn't carry it," she said. "Everybody knows they can get it in the mountains, but now they're realizing they can get it in other parts of the country or just order it online."

The ointment is an aloe gel, laden with extracts of witch hazel, goldenseal, white cedar, gotu kola, Yarrow, calendula, comfrey leaf and lobelia. "The properties of the product are anti-bacterial, anti-fungal and anti-inflammatory," MacKay explained, saying they're suspended in corn alcohol to keep the ingredients pure.

"Each herb does several different things to make it have those properties. If you've got poison ivy, you're going to have itching, redness and swelling, so it helps all those symptoms, but instead of just focusing on itching, it does all of those things to help it heal and dry up quickly."



Wounded Warrior also heals sunburn by soothing flaking, red skin, as well as bug bites to prevent swelling. MacKay said it is ideal for bee stings and other skin conditions. "I've had people call me and say they'd had a rash for a year but tried Wounded Warrior, and it was gone," she added.

The ointment's efficiency can also be attributed to Chief Two Trees, a Cherokee medicine man in North Carolina, who MacKay said was a good family friend. Two Trees inspired the product's name, as well as the bottle design, which depicts a red tail hawk clutching a ginseng root, flying by a crescent moon.

The herb business, in general, has soared like a hawk, with commonplace products featuring herbs and supplements, including toothpaste, MacKay said.

"People are realizing natural products work, and people don't want to put some strange chemical in their body – they want to use something natural that will heal them without causing a reaction," she continued. "Wounded Warrior is great for people who have reactions to different products, because they know they can use it and not have that happen."

Though Wounded Warrior's formula will remain the same, MacKay is considering using the formula in different ways, such as expanding the product line to include a specially bottled product for animals.

One variety will be especially for children. Since the original formula features corn alcohol, MacKay mentioned a children's formula that would include less alcohol to lessen the sting. Another will be a healing shampoo, as well as a spray bottle.

"My dad's got some great formulas in his brain that, one day, I'll want to get out and start making some different products and start expanding our product line to become the next big North Carolina success story," MacKay said. "Our customers are very good about giving us suggestions on what they would like and how they use it."

MacKay said customers call and e-mail her every day, sharing stories and testimonials. For more information on Wounded Warrior, or to share comments, call (800) 232-7713 or visit www.woundedwarriorointment.com on the Web.