



Skin savior



STAFF PHOTO | KEN BLAVINS
Amy MacKay sits in her office at her Wilmington home. Ms. MacKay sells Wounded Warrior, an all-natural topical ointment (pictured above) for skin problems that has become popular primarily through word of mouth.

Some call it a miracle; others call it relief. A look at what all the buzz is about

By Allison Ballard
Staff Writer

It started with a Louisiana fisherman, someone Red Alderman, a self-taught herb man, didn't even know. The man needed help. In a letter sent across several states to the mountains of North Carolina, the man wrote that he had sore hands – hands poked by catfish barbs, cut by fishhooks and chapped from water and sun. Wasn't there something, some herbal remedy, that could help?

Mr. Alderman, a recreational fisherman himself, thought about it and began experimenting with a formula of witch hazel, goldenseal, white cedar and other ingredients processed in pharmaceutical grade alcohol. Those extracts, mixed with aloe to create a brownish gel, would become Wounded Warrior, a homegrown ointment now making its way across the country.

It's been more than 10 years since the ointment's humble beginnings. But unless you vacation in the mountains of North Carolina and happen to have seen one of the five-minute infomercials or have visited the company's Web site, you may not have heard of Wounded Warrior.

Those who know it, though, swear by it. Testimonials on the Web site call the ointment a "miracle," and its uses are varied. Folks use it to treat everything from insect bites and acne to rashes, cuts and scars.

The name of the ointment is mentioned frequent-

ly in chat rooms about skin conditions. Each time Amy MacKay, daughter of the inventor and manager of Wounded Warrior, hears a new use for the ointment, she learns all she can about the condition.

One of the most recent is Darier disease, a rare skin condition also called keratosis follicularis and characterized by severe itchy rashes and hardening of the skin around the hair follicles.

Some people with Darier disease claim that Wounded Warrior is the only thing that's helped them.

Some women have even used it to heal episiotomy wounds after the birth of a child. "Basically people just go nuts for it," Ms. MacKay said.

A map in a home office in Wilmington, where the company is managed, shows the growth. Lots of little red pins, marking where the ointment is sold, are clustered in North Carolina, then thin out as they move into other states.

And more pins mark Wounded Warriors' expanding outer reaches. There's one in Arcata, Calif., and another in Hilo, Hawaii, where it's sold in one of the top 100 stores on the Pacific. There's a pin in Maine and another in Key West, Fla.

Wounded Warrior is sold in 275 stores in 23 states (and about three more are added each week). You can find it in health food shops, Harley Davidson dealerships, drug stores (both independents and chains) and even a framing outlet. The ointment is sold for \$10.44 a bottle.

SKIN

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The ointment is one of the top sellers at Boone Drug at Deerfield, said pharmacist John Stacy. Customers buy it mostly for poison ivy and rashes.

"It's a good product," he said. "It's a lot of herbs and over-the-counter stuff."

Ms. MacKay attributes the ointment's success to word of mouth.

Before first making Wounded Warrior, Mr. Alderman sold bulk herbs to cosmetic and pharmaceutical companies all over the

world. Before that, he was in the Earth Studies department at Appalachian State University, making suggestions to local farmers for alternative crops to tobacco.

"We worked on the mixture for four years until we hit one exactly what we wanted," he said.

A Cherokee medicine man suggested one plant that had traditionally been used by American Indians warriors to help stop bleeding and take away pain. This is what eventually led to the product's name.

While researchers tend to focus on one beneficial aspect of herbs, the plants likely have a

broad range of helpful properties, Mr. Alderman said. That's why he believes so many people have found so many different uses for the ointment.

But, as successful as Wounded Warrior is on a grassroots level, it almost didn't happen.

Mr. Alderman and a friend went to a business consultant who just couldn't get too excited about the multi-purpose ointment. He complained that the product wouldn't make it on the market because it wasn't specific enough.

"He said 'People won't believe it. It'll be like snake oil,'"

Mr. Alderman said. "And, to be honest, it kind of discouraged us for a while."

Obviously, they didn't let it get them down for long.

In January, Ms. MacKay took over managing the business in Wilmington. She talks with her father about four or five times a day. He oversees some of the production while she manages the Web site and shipping.

Friends know her as the Wounded Warrior woman.

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