



Every Pure Enchantment soap and lotion bar is made and cut by hand by owners Debbie and Bill Brink.

Cleaning Up

It started as a hobby, blossomed into a side business and now, a local line of natural personal-care products called Pure Enchantment has grown into one Rocky River couple's full-time venture.

Three things changed Debbie Brink's life: a vacation, an evening shower and a bar of soap.

While traveling in North Carolina with her family in 2001, Brink passed a natural soap stand and bought a bar for herself and a few for her friends. "I used it that night, and I was amazed at how soft my skin felt," Brink recalls.

Intrigued by the effects of the natural soap, Brink researched soap-making, took a few classes and soon was creating natural soaps and shea butter lotion bars out of her basement. By 2003, Debbie and her husband, Bill, launched Pure Enchantment, a natural personal-care company.

Their signature lotion bar is a combination of shea butter, avocado, almond and jojoba oils, a little beeswax to help the bar solidify, vitamin E and a touch of fragrance or essential oil. Packaged in an easy-open tin (and less messy than its liquid counterpart), the lotion was Debbie's first product. Now, about 75 percent of Pure Enchantment's sales come from the lotion bar and foot balm.

But she didn't get into the business looking to make lots of money. "I just loved it, and it was fun," Debbie says. "It was something pretty, small and nice. I never really thought about the big picture."

Still, the big picture has been hard for her to ignore. In the first year, the company doubled in size and has seen steady 25 to 30 percent growth every year since.

The Brinks' products can be found in more than 50 salons, spas and specialty boutiques in 11 states, including Pennsylvania's luxurious Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort, which, according to Bill, bought into their products the same day he pitched it. The Brinks now create a private label for Nemaocolin, which distributes the products in promotional gift packages.

At the end of July, Bill closed a deal with the Hudson Group's flagship airport store, called Hudson News. Six store locations at Cleveland Hopkins International Airport and seven at Baltimore/Washington International will feature countertop displays of travel-size versions of Pure Enchantment lotion and foot balm bars. These products are considered "airport-friendly" because, coming in a solid form, they don't fall under the 3-1-1 rule, they don't carry-on luggage (3-ounce contain-

ers inside a 1 quart plastic bag and only one bag per traveler).

Pure Enchantment had been a side business for the Rocky River couple until this year when Debbie, who worked for the Chicago Title Co., and Bill, a real estate agent, left their respective jobs to pursue the venture full time.

Debbie made all Pure Enchantment products in the basement of their home until December, when the couple moved into their new Rocky River headquarters. "It got to the point where it was too much," and soaps and lotion bars were taking up every room of the house.

Debbie is half scientist, half baker as she stands in the small kitchen that looks as clean and sterile as a hospital lab. She still makes every soap and lotion bar by hand. Her methods are self-taught through books and a few soap-making classes. What she has learned has been mostly through trial and error — sometimes a little more error than she'd like.

"It was funny — all the books said, 'Make sure to use a stainless steel pot,' but they never said why," Debbie recalls. It was the first time she tried making soap at home.

Admittedly, curiosity got the better of her. Bypassing the rules, Debbie started to mix in a different metal pot. "Immediately, black stuff started pouring up. And almost immediately, the carbon monoxide alarm went off," she recalls, learning the hard way that the reaction between the chemicals in soap and the aluminum in cookware causes a big mess. Now everything she uses is stainless steel.

"This whole thing has been a learning experience," she says.

Debbie has found the simpler she keeps her product, the better it sells. When Debbie started making soaps, she had 20 fragrances in a variety of colors. They were

nice to look at, but "people weren't using them," she says. "They were putting them in their bathrooms as decoration."

The same simplicity applies with the product name. Sales of her citrus-scented bar were slow when it was marketed as Maui Sunset. By renaming it for the actual scent combination — orange patchouli — it flew off the shelves. She also carries cucumber melon, oatmeal milk and honey, coconut lime verbena, almond, lavender rosemary and a fragrance-free variety.

Customers with eczema, rosacea, psoriasis and elderly customers with extremely dry skin have all said the same thing about Pure Enchantment: It cleared up their skin irritations. The couple even received a glowing letter of recommendation from dermatologist Dr. Helen Torok at Trillium Creek Dermatology in Medina, who wrote the couple that she "highly recommends these products to colleagues for their patients with dry, sensitive skin."

"So many people have skin problems because they are using a harsh soap," Debbie says, explaining most commercial soaps remove the glycerin (good for you) and keep the lye (not so good for you), "so you're left with a detergent bar."

Pure Enchantment's products do exactly the opposite. By the time the bar is ready for commercial use, the lye is gone and it's the glycerin that still remains. "Our bars are not just something that smells nice and looks nice, it's also good for you," she says.

Debbie grew up in a family of entrepreneurs, from her grandparents to her father. She remembers constantly brainstorming business ideas with a high school friend. She briefly made gift baskets and sold Mary Kay and Avon products. She loved to bake — be it cookies, pies or bread — and picked up cross-stitch and cake decorating.

"I always wanted to do something and make it my own. [Soap-making] is something that combined the creative side of me and baking side of me," she says.

Now, she and Bill see an open market to brand their product as consumers become more conscious of what they eat and what they put on their skin.

"We have such a great opportunity with the current frenzy of the green movement," Debbie says. "People are more aware and want natural products. And we want to brand our name in that market." ■

