

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 2004

DayBreak Lavender Farm

What: A Streetsboro farm that produces lavender for use in soaps and other natural beauty products made by the farm's owners.

Where: 2129 Frost Road, Streetsboro

Call: 330-626-3235.

Web:
www.soap-please.com



Farm has a bumper crop of beauty products

GINGER BURNETT
Special to the Plain Dealer

Jody Byrne whips her golf cart across the sprawling grounds of her Streetsboro farm on a blustery afternoon.

She's got one hand on the steering wheel and the other proudly points out her first bed of lavender, a quarter-acre herb garden and six hives teaming with honey bees.

"We're using the power of nature," says Byrne, owner of the DayBreak Lavender Farm, which she believes is the first and only one of its kind in Ohio. "We have 1,000 lavender plants in all. It's like putting in a vineyard."

Her analogy is apt. Byrne, an energetic woman with a radiant smile, is a soap artisan, and her picturesque 14-acre estate yields the herbs that she transforms into 60 varieties of all-natural, handmade soap and a bevy of garden-fresh spa and skin-care luxuries.

She and her husband, Michael Slyker, 55, are two ex-hippies on their way to becoming the local Ben & Jerry of the bath and body industry.

Byrne, 59, a former editor at American Salon magazine, bought the former dairy farm in 1993. Eight years later, she and Slyker began planting lavender. "She's going to break out big – I'm not kidding," says Susan Cline, owner of the Spa at Springfield in Strongsville, one of a growing number of Northeast Ohio vendors who sell Byrne's alternative line of skin-care products, spa luxuries and soaps.

Cline says the soap are so lavish that people tell her they look for excuses to wash their hands or hop in the shower.

"This is the new wave of the way people are looking at finding natural alternatives for skin care," says Cline. "I already see her company skyrocketing."

Indeed, DayBreak is growing quickly – though Byrne declines to give sales figures – and entirely by word of mouth. Both East and West Side vendors say they're struggling to keep up with customer demand for

Byrne's products.

"We've carried the line just over a month, and we've already had to place three orders to restock," says Kerry Yoak, manager of Sunnybrook Farms Nursery in Chester Township. In Strongsville, Cline reports similar door-busting demand.

The products whipping customers into a lather include a Lavender Mint Salt Glow (\$18.95), an all-natural exfoliator made with real mint leaves and lavender buds; a Deluxe Creme de Karite (\$19.95), a healing all-over moisturizer – made from 70 percent unrefined shea butter; Rassoul Daily Face Radiance (\$16.95), a complexion bar made from a rare Moroccan clay; and Lavender Lilac Vodka Splash (\$12.95), a refreshing body spritz and mood tonic made from lavender a shot of vodka.

For masculine tastes, DayBreak also creates a line of sandalwood-based soap and aftershave balms made from rare genuine Mysore sandalwood with rose otto essential oil from India and vetiver



Jody Byrne and Michael Slyker turned the dairy farm in Streetsboro that she bought in 1993 into a lavender farm. The lavender will begin blooming in June and will be in full bloom in July. Byrne uses the herb to make all-natural soaps and beauty products.

essential oil from Africa.

All of the products are handcrafted by Byrne in the couple's basement soap studio.

There, tables are covered with brown bottles of exotic imported oils and large, steel mixing bowls, nearly overflowing with soap. Each variety is hand-poured and cured for 90 days, then rough-cut into blocks that release an assertive fragrance in a steamy shower or hot bath. Along the walls, tall, multi-tiered racks house scores of song chunks of soap.

At first glance, DayBreak's products might look like any other line professing to contain only natural ingredients. But what sets them apart are the quantity and purity of those ingredients

The Deluxe Creme de Karite, for example, which comes in a 4-ounce jar and looks like cocoa butter, contains 70 percent unrefined shea butter imported from Ghana. Similar products sold at chain retailers might rival DayBreak's prices, but they contain only 2 to 12 percent shea, and they often include chemicals and preservatives, which Byrne says strip the butter of its healing properties.

DayBreak _ which has 11 seasonal employees – began selling the goods to local vendors last fall. Today, they're available at a variety of places, including the Mustard Seed Markets in Fairlawn and Solon, Uncle John's Plant Farm in Olmsted Falls, Sunnybrook Farms Nursery in Chester Township and other area garden centers and spas.

They're also available through Byrne's Web site, www.soap-please.com, and

beginning Saturday, May 1, at Heinen's grocery stores. In addition, Byrne exhibits regularly at the North Union Farmers Market at Shaker Square and occasionally holds open houses at her home.

In November, she and Slyker held a three-day holiday open house, with customers traveling from as far away as Youngstown. Much to Byrne's surprise, the open house yielded quadruple the sales of her summer open house.

A family history in beauty business

Byrne's family roots run deep in the salon and beauty industry. Her grandfather was a publisher of hair and beauty magazines, including *American Salon*, from the 1930s through the '50s. Before that, in 1929, he founded the International Beauty Show, which still is held annually in New York. With a beauty pedigree reaching back two generations, Byrne says she grew up acquiring an encyclopedic knowledge of the industry.

So, in addition to her soapmaking, Byrne is an independent national trend forecaster for the salon, beauty, wellness and spa industries. The professional divisions of L'Oreal, Clairol and Shiseido are among her many clients.

To most people around here, though, she is best known as the "Soap Lady of Shaker Square." Her creations – artfully cut Wedges with delicious names such as Prairie Oat Mint and Limoni di Sicilia – have fostered a groupie-like following of

"soap-a-holics," who fervently shop her booth during the farmers market.

Their black-and-white toile-printed DayBreak shopping bags quickly fill up with chunky bars, luxurious lotions, Victorian lavender wands (a portable, fragrant sachet) and lavender-infused culinary spices, sugars and honey.

"I can't tell you how many people come up to my booth and say, 'I shouldn't be standing here. My closet is filled with soap,'" says Byrne. "And that's the person I know is going to buy six bars."

"I love her stuff," says Susan Bercheck, owner of Sunnybrook Farm. "It's so natural, and the fragrance is so personal."

Demand, in fact, already has prompted Byrne to pass her technique on. This year, her husband became DayBreak's master soap artisan, freeing up Byrne to focus on now products such as a rose-petal skin-care line for rosacea sufferers, lavender bath teas and a Brown Sugar Rassoul Body Polish. She's now looking for additional employees to train as soap makers.

DayBreak's gathering success isn't lost on Byrne.

"I didn't start this business to compromise or cut corners," she says. "I make soap, skin-care [products] and toiletries my way, and that means using only the finest of ingredients in significant amounts.

"And I did bet the farm on it."

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