

Parkinson's disease. "Look at the rise in autistic children," he continues. "Environmentalists blame that directly on exposure to pesticides, pesticides on your lawn." Perdue, he says, found that weed and feed-type combo herbicide/fertilizers are "directly linked to bladder cancer in dogs. What does that say for little toddlers playing in the grass?"

In a publication he writes for St. Gabriel Organics called Organic Gardening and Green Gossip, he lists non-organically grown vegetables, like the ones at the supermarket, "found to contain the residue of more than one pesticide." Top of the list? Bell peppers with 11 toxins, followed closely by peaches, apples, celery and lettuce with nine each! The bottom of the list, with two toxins each, are bananas, asparagus and mangoes.

"Chemical pesticides have gotten the bug world out of balance," he continues. "Before, there was a bug here to control that one and nature you know in its wonderful marvel, kept everything in balance." He exhales in exasperation. "It's only been 50 years since we've had chemical pesticides. What did farmers do before that? They used natural means of controlling things."

Mary jumps into the fray, saying the pests are developing immunities resulting in a destructive upward spiraling of developing stronger and stronger pesticides to control ever harder pests. "The good insects don't have a chance," she protests. "The earthworms, the ladybugs, the praying mantis; it (chemicals) attacks everyone and just goes and kills everything."

And then there are the fertilizers. "The farmers were told, 'hey you can get much bigger yields with our fertilizers; never mind that they're synthetic and that they grow tomatoes and all kinds of vegetables with fewer nutrients in them,' scoffs Ted. "As long as they can get more per acre and they look good, that's what they're going for." He writes, "It takes 25 cans of spinach produced on farms today to equal the nutrient level contained in one can of spinach produced in the 1970s."

Apparently the public is listening to Ted's trumpet. "Our business keeps expanding every year, even in this economy," he notes. "People are tuning in and they are more hip today than they ever were." And St. Gabriel's product line keeps expanding, as a quick flip through their catalog reveals.

In addition to the 'old faithful' Milky Spore, St. Gabriel Organics produces BugShooter, a natural garden spray using clove and peppermint oil. They also manufacture an insect dust that uses Diatomaceous earth to cut

insect exoskeletons open to dehydrate them to death. And they have recently introduced a product called FlySwatter for use in barns. It kills fly larvae on manure.

Mary reports that this product underwent successful field testing at the recent Keswick Horse Show. "Seeing

uses clove oil and refined citric acid as its active ingredients. Ted says "it works faster than chemical weed killers and it's very safe for the environment, plus 36 hours later, it breaks down into a soil nutrient." Herbicides include a pre-emergent broadleaf preventative that employs corn gluten to prevent seed germination. They also produce a moss killer and a poison ivy defoliant. And it's all safe!

They make deer and mole repellent too. "You can put Holy Moley in your yard in the afternoon, and get up real early the next morning while you're having coffee and you see the moles packing up and heading to your neighbor's yard," claims Ted with a mischievous grin.

What's next? A fish emollient called Holy Mackerel, and "we're going to come out with a bovine excrement as a fertilizer and we're going to call that Holy Cow." At least it won't be called Holy Something else. Never mind.

Speaking of fertilizer, St. Gabriel uses "huge Antarctic sea kelp harvested from the ocean floor off Cape Town, South Africa" for its plant, veggie and lawn boosters. "Sea Kelp increases resistance to frost and cold temperatures," claims the catalog. They even produce an ice melt product that doesn't use salt, "so it won't kill the grass."

And at the back of the catalog you can order all kinds of organic herbs and vegetable seeds, even organic cheeses from none other than Orange's own Marshall Farms. The next page reveals a familiar face, that of Pomme's Chef, Gerard Gasparini, who volunteers a few tasty organic recipes.

Back at the production facility in the Lee Industrial Park, Rob Reuter strolls into the lab. Technician, Cathy Stiles is peering through a microscope, counting milky spores. Mary Reuter refers to her son and Cathy as "the brew masters." This is where the action is, where products are developed and tested.

St. Gabriel's is marketed all over the country. You can even find it at Faulconer Hardware and at the Co-op, and to think it was all made right here. Fair warning, however, it is more expensive than non-organic pesticides and herbicides.

"So what?" trumpets Ted Reuter. "It's cheaper than doctor bills because that's exactly what you're going to have," chimes in Mary. "I grew up in the same era that 'more is better.' The more pesticides and fertilizer that you can put down, the

faster it works, the prettier your yard can be...Bigger and better, but that doesn't mean they're safer...Granted, organic products, not only St. Gabriel but whoever else has organic products, it takes a little longer; it's a little more expensive, but it's a heck of a lot safer that what's being put down now."

is believing, as far as I'm concerned," she says. "I need to see it, because I don't put anything out there that doesn't work." BugShooter, by the way also comes in an indoor variety, along with a kitchen-safe insect control called AntEater.

They also produce four herbicides: BurnOut II which



PHIL AUDIBERT

St. Gabriel Organics employee, Mike Basile fills jugs with coffee-colored mosquito repellent, made from citronella, garlic oil, and white pepper.



PHIL AUDIBERT

Three production lines run simultaneously at St. Gabriel Organics in the Lee Industrial Park off of Route 15 south of Orange.

## the Messenger

The year was 1967. Ted and Mary Reuter were on their first date together. Both devout Catholics, they were visiting the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception at Catholic University in Washington. At the gift store, Ted spied a book entitled "A Saint a Day." He looked up that day's saint, and it was the Archangel, St. Gabriel, the divine messenger.

It just so happens that Ted's job at the time as a broadcast journalist for WOL Radio was winding down. And it just so happens that St. Gabriel is the patron saint of broadcasters and journalists, which makes perfect sense because the Archangel, with his trumpet, delivered the message to Mary that she would bear the son of God.

"So I went back upstairs and said a few prayers; I needed a job," recalls Ted. "When I got back to where I was living at the time, there was a phone call waiting for me and it was from the Mutual Broadcasting System. So, that all happened the same day."

Talk about the stars coming into line all at once: patron saint of journalists, the messenger; on his day of the year; at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, which honors the message he delivered; and a soon to be out-of-work journalist with the woman he will eventually marry; with a dream-come-true job offer; all on the same day...well, that's more than just coincidence.

No wonder Ted and Mary Reuter attach particular significance to St. Gabriel. But, it has even more meaning today. St. Gabriel Organics is Ted and Mary's Orange County company that produces a 100 percent, all-organic product line of safe pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, repellants,



PHIL AUDIBERT



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Top photo, St. Gabriel Organics is a family owned and operated business. From left to right, Ted and Mary Reuter, with son Rob. Alex, another of the Reuter's six children, is also employed by the Orange County business. Above, Ted Reuter worked his way up with the Mutual Broadcasting System to become Washington Bureau Chief. He covered the White House, Capitol Hill, and the State Department.

feed supplements, medicinal herbs and organic seeds. "The message," says the diminutive Mary, "is getting the word out about organics; natural, good things in life."

Here's another coincidence. The Lee Industrial Park production facility stands in the shadow of St. Isidore Catholic Church on Rt. 15. St. Isidore is the patron saint of farmers, the folks who would benefit most from what St. Gabriel has to offer. How cool is that?

"We are all organic," continues Mary. "We are the leaders. We don't make anything other than organic." Other companies may be bigger, but they also produce petrochemical products. "They can't say they're 100 percent organic. But we can, and we never made anything that wasn't." In fact, the Reuters proudly display on their products the seal of approval from the Organic Material Review Institute (OMRI). It means that "this particular product is organically sound, and that's a huge thing for these big organic growers."

Chemical pesticides and herbicides have a distinctive odor. It is an ominous smell that says if you drink, eat, inhale, even come in contact with me, you will be in for a world of hurt. No so at St. Gabriel's. As soon as you walk in the building, you are greeted by a pleasant spicy aroma. "What you're smelling is a combination of garlic, citronella, white pepper. That's what you're

smelling," says the Reuter's son, Rob during a tour of the production line. He jokes that the reason the fellow who is filling the plastic jugs with the dark brown liquid has no gray hair is "he actually takes a little sip every now and then."

Just kidding. Of course he doesn't drink it; it's made of citronella and garlic oil. It would probably make him vomit. But if he drank Malathion for example, he'd probably be dead.

St. Gabriel Organics' signature product is Milky Spore. It



PHIL AUDIBERT

Dean Helmick fills and checks bags of St. Gabriel's signature product, Milky Spore. In granular form, it is essentially freeze dried bacteria that once applied to your lawn will activate and feed on Japanese Beetle grubs.

is a biological control for Japanese Beetles with a rather odd name. "Milky spore is a bacteria whose host is the Japanese Beetle," patiently explains Mary. "When the grubs feed off the roots of the grass, they ingest this product. And when they ingest it, it turns their body into a milky substance, and then they just die off. So, they never go into pupae, and they never become adult beetles."

The spores also multiply and migrate from grub to grub. If you follow the instructions on the package, you are guaranteed to be Japanese beetle-free for 10 years! "Safe for use around waterways, wells, and ponds," reads the literature. "Harmless to pets and humans," it continues. "Does not harm beneficial insects."

Ted jokes, "You could have it on your breakfast cereal, and suffer no harmful effect from it." Well, of course you're not going to do that; it probably tastes awful. But you get the point.

"When we first started making this 33 years ago, people thought we were talking about biological warfare. But now it's completely turned around 180 degrees," he elaborates. "People understand the need for things that are organic in nature and that are safer to use. Every environmental group in the United States is blaming petrochemicals for everything from autistic children to allergies and Parkinson's disease."

And so, St. Gabriel's message has changed to getting the word out about the harm that petrochemical-based pesticides are doing to us and the environment. Reuter, with the typical journalist's tenacity of a Jack Russell terrier, has probed, studied and researched this issue, and what he has to say is somewhat alarming.

He quotes studies from various environmental groups and universities. He says Cornell has linked Sevin dust directly to

At the front desk at St. Gabriel Organics shadow boxes mounted to the wall display a collection of insects that defies description. Looking like some horrible mad scientist biotampering experiment gone awry, the names of these huge bugs and moths aptly describes them: Atticus Atlas is a moth fully eight inches across. How about Eurcantha horiba or Goliathus goliath, a Ugandan beetle fully nine inches long.

But the most horrible is the Iraq Camel Spider. It is huge. "Those spiders are capable of crawling up onto a sleeping camel and numbing the hump, and burrowing inside and eating the hump of a camel from inside out," winces Ted Reuter. "The poor American soldiers over there, they'd be in their sleeping bags and these things would crawl in there and numb their leg and start eating their leg away. And they're that prevalent; they're all over the place." Too bad they don't have some BugShooter II to zap them, although in this case it might take more than that. The Iraq Camel Spider's only natural enemy is the scorpion. Two of them flank the spider exhibit, as if to say, "it takes two of us to get one you."

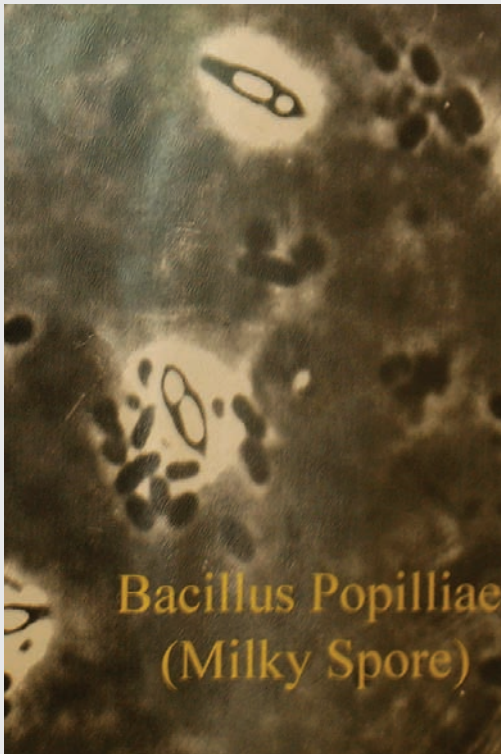
Where in the world did these creatures come from? Ted has collected most, but not all of them himself. The camel spider came from his son-in-law who flies C-5A cargo planes in and out of Baghdad. But the tarantulas and moths he has collected on their various travels around the world.

Are they test subjects for the lab?

No. We have to go further back to when Ted was offered the job



## Ted & Mary Reuter



Bacillus Popilliae (Milky Spore)

with Mutual Broadcasting to flesh out this story. Mary, who was born in Japan and has lived in this country since age three, accepted Ted's marriage proposal following that prophetic date to the National Shrine. With a degree from the University of Pittsburg in biology, she was working at the time for a Falls Church medical center. "I did a lot of laboratory medical procedures," she notes.

Ted meanwhile was making a name for himself with the Mutual Broadcasting System. It was he who made arrangements with the only two foreign reporters allowed to remain in Castro's Cuba to file reports to the outside world. They belonged to the largest news gathering operation in the world, Reuters, to which, by the way, Ted may have a familial connection on his father's side. Anyway, he says, "We were the only network on the air that had anything from Cuba."

Ted, with his mellifluous radio voice, went on to become Mutual's Washington Bureau Chief. He covered the State Department, Capitol Hill and the White House, and he reported on the 1967 and 1972 wars from the Middle East. He also developed an interest in environmental issues, and it was here that he learned of a USDA program developing milky spores to control Japanese beetles. "Mary," he said, "you can do this."

And so with three little kids still at home and more on the way, Mary, with her medical laboratory background, commuted every day from Centreville to Beltsville, MD to learn the process of propagating milky spore from a man named Sam Dutky. "So he gave me all the nuances, the little things you need to know that books just can't tell you. It was a big learning thing for me, and I learned it. I got it," she says with a note of finality.

They started a business, Reuter Labs, and it was a big success, although "when we first started making this 33 years ago, people thought we were talking about biological warfare," says Ted ruefully.

The business attracted the attention of the environmentally conscientious Christine Ford family. "We sold the company to them and then traveled the world." And did they ever travel the world... for 12 years with as many as six children in tow. They even spent a year and a half in New Zealand.

It was while they were there that they learned their old company had been spun off and had gone into bankruptcy. "People got in touch with us and said, 'look, you should come back and make your product because no one is producing it.' So that's what we did," says Ted. That was in 1995.

They couldn't keep the Reuter name, but they still had their reputation. All their old clients came back. And from there, they start-

ed researching and expanding their product line. They moved the business from Haymarket and Gainesville to Orange in 2001 because "all of a sudden the place (Haymarket) just exploded with homes and with traffic." Here they have a few acres to test their products under the watchful eye of Saints Gabriel and Isidore. Two Reuter sons, Rob and Alex, have joined in the business.

Not long ago, the Reuters traveled to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to see if they could find an organic and safe solution to a pest called the Palm Boll Weevil. "They didn't want to use chemical pes-



Above, taken some time in the late 1970s, this photo shows Ted and Mary Reuter with two employees at their production facility in Haymarket. Since then, they sold the business, traveled the world for a dozen years, bought the business back, renamed it, and moved it to Orange. Top left, both devout Catholics, Ted and Mary Reuter's first date together was at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. It was here that St. Gabriel's name became an important symbol in their lives. Bottom left, this is what milky spore looks like under magnification. According to Rob Reuter, "on the tip of a needle you could have a million spore." Each has the potential to invade a Japanese Beetle grub and turning its insides into a milk-like substance.

ticides on the date palm trees because they didn't want them to be absorbed into the dates that people eat. So we went over there and studied it and solved the problem with a hot pepper wax spray that we could treat the trees with," says Ted. "The hot pepper wax, which is made up of a variety Mexican peppers, is all natural and it didn't harm the trees or the dates. So, that was a successful thing."

Another ongoing successful thing is the flagship product, Milky Spore. When properly applied it will rid your yard of Japanese beetles for 25 years! "We have too good of a product," laughs Ted. "We don't get many repeat customers."

But they'll get plenty of new ones who have heeded the message coming from St. Gabriel's horn.