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## Local News

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### Niagara businessman picks up \$200,000 grant as Ontario's innovator of the year

Posted By GRANT LaFLECHE Standard Staff

Posted 12 hours ago

For Steve Hengesperger, it's all about the ozone.

Two years ago, after spending millions of dollars, the Welland native invented a way to use ozone-infused water as an anti-bacteria, anti-viral household cleaner.

The idea wasn't all that novel. Water with ozone had been used as a cleanser for industrial operations, hospitals and municipalities for a while. But there wasn't anything for Joe Consumer to use to clean his produce or house.

Hengesperger's Lotus products did just that. And on Thursday the provincial government named the owner of St. Catharines-based Tersano Inc. the innovator of the year.

"I didn't realize it was such an honour until I saw the list of people who were also on the list with me," Hengesperger said in a telephone interview. "They are all a lot smarter than me."

The award, part of the premier's Catalyst Awards that recognize innovation and entrepreneurship in Ontario, comes with a \$200,000 grant.

The money will be used for research and development into uses of the Lotus technology in commercial settings.

"It's a big deal because it allows us to continue with the research to help us continue to expand," he said.

It took Hengesperger and his team four years to miniaturize technology used to infuse ozone into water so that it could be used as a household cleaner.

What they created was a spray bottle that, after filled with tap water, is placed into a machine that adds the ozone to the water.

When released into the air, ozone can be a serious pollutant, irritating the eyes and lungs. Smog warnings during the summer often include information on the amount of ozone in the air.



Steve Hengesperger

Staff photo

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When used in water, however, it can be used to kill bacteria and viruses without the use of chemicals.

Shortly after his product was released, Time magazine tagged it as one of the top inventions of 2006.

Hengesperger, who expects \$8 million in sales this year, said retailers are anxious to sell environmentally friendly technology. Getting consumers from a chemically dependent culture to believe they can clean their homes with water is another thing entirely.

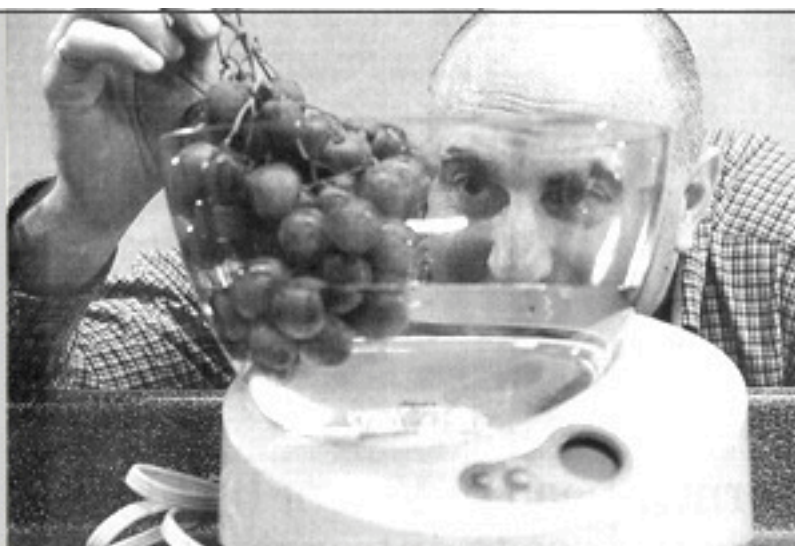
"Consumers are another animal and it's sometimes hard to get them to believe it," he said.

That's why Tersano is researching more commercial applications of the technology. Specifically, Hengesperger said, the company is developing a Lotus machine that can clean produce for restaurants.

More information about the Catalyst Awards can be found online at [www.mri.gov.on.ca](http://www.mri.gov.on.ca)

Article ID# 1010029





## Steve's in the zone — ozone

Invention creates ozonated water that takes on dirt, bacteria, odour, stains, mould

By TIFFANY MAYER  
Standard Staff

Mr. Clean might want to grab a copy of the want ads.

The longtime crusader against all things dirty could find himself out of a job, his mug replaced in cleaning circles by an unlikely candidate.

Tap water.

Steve Hengsperger is turning the lowly liquid into a household cleaning superpower.

The Welland native is the mastermind behind the Lotus Sanitizing System, a contraption that gives tap water a boost by infusing it with oxygen.

The result is ozonated water, a liquid that takes on dirt, bacteria, odour, stains, mould and mildew in household chores and wins, sans chemicals.

"Who would ever think that with tap water you can do all these things that you can with chemicals?" Hengsperger said.

It all started when he set out to develop a water-purification system for home use. The idea took on new purpose thanks to Hengsperger's employ-

ees at Advantage Engineering, a company in Windsor that makes prototype plastic parts for the automotive industry.

Hengsperger, a mechanical engineer, was baffled by his workers' complaints about chemical smells at work. They would demand to see material safety data sheets to make sure they weren't being exposed to anything dangerous.

But their ardent stance would waver off the clock, he explained.

"It's amazing. At home, they think nothing of spraying whatever, day in and day out," he said.

That's when Hengsperger realized there was a "bigger, better application" for ozonated water — to replace cleaning chemicals in the home.

Sitting in the boardroom at Tersano Inc., Hengsperger's St. Catharines-based company that distributes the Lotus, he rhymed off the attributes of ozonated water to the sound of one of the machines zapping a water-filled spray bottle with an electrical charge to add the extra oxygen.

It's 50 per cent more powerful than bleach, he said. It works 3,000 times faster than the chemical, too, because the extra oxygen molecule, active for about 15 minutes after the water is

charged, latches on to bacteria, including E. coli, and oxidizes it.

The system also comes with a bowl to sanitize fruit and vegetables, even removing pesticide residues, he explained.

"What we do get from chefs in restaurants who write in is that the fruits and vegetables taste better," Hengsperger said.

They also stay fresher, longer, he added.

The Lotus came on the market this year in Canadian Tire stores, selling for \$199.

Hengsperger said his team is looking at ways to improve the system that's been third-party tested, and bring down the cost in the process. But for now, he's marketing the Lotus as money well spent.

"It's fairly easy to justify \$199 when you think about the chemicals you buy in a year and the fruits and vegetables that you'll eat because you won't have to throw them out," he said.

Hengsperger, who divides his time between Windsor and the Garden City, said the toughest sell has been his wife, who wasn't quite ready to give up on her repertoire of chemical-laden cleaning products.

**"Who would ever think that with tap water you can do all these things that you can with chemicals?"**

Steve Hengsperger

Please see Invention page A8