



Steve Hengsperger juggles his time between promoting his newest invention and its company, and running his successful business Advantage Engineering in Oldcastle. (Pictured at his Oldcastle machine shop.)

Named as one of the best inventions of 2006 by Time Magazine, Steve Hengsperger's Lotus Sanitizing System is set to become a household name.

LOCAL entrepreneur recognized for **BEST INVENTION**

Story By Danielle Findlay

For the past two years, children all over North America have come to the dinner table with a bounce in their step and a grin on their face. Much to many a mother's dismay, bean sprouts, green onions and spinach were forced off grocery lists due to *E. coli* and salmonella outbreaks. But it's mom who gets the last laugh, with a revolutionary new product that will put spinach back on the dinner menu. The Lotus Sanitizing System acts as a natural powerful sanitizer by using an electrical charge to infuse ordinary tap water with ozone. The system neutralizes 99.99 per cent of harmful bacterium like *E. coli*, and is a safe and effective way to sanitize food.

The Lotus system was created by Steve Hengsperger and developed at Tersano Inc., the facility Hengsperger established in St. Catherine's to manufacture and market the product. Hengsperger has become a master of time management, sharing his energy with his second business, Advantage Engineering Inc. in Oldcastle, a company founded on advanced computer aided design and machining technologies. Travelling is increasingly becoming part of Hengsperger's regular routine, causing him to spend less time in Oldcastle. "I have great people here at Advantage Engineering. I'm fortunate enough that I can be away for a few days at a time," he states. A graduate of the University of Waterloo, Hengsperger's specialty is in robotics and environmental engineering, but, he says, "I am also adamant that we all go to school to learn how to learn. I love to learn and to find ways to do things better, quicker, and cheaper which is what drives me to continuously improve things in my life around me." He invented the Lotus Sanitizing System almost five years ago while working on a water purifier using the same technology. "I was working on a water purifier when I learned about how powerful (yet natural) ozone in water was", says Hengsperger.

Hengsperger happened to be in the right place at the right time when he set up a Tersano display at a food event in New York City last May. The event attracted several food service workers and plenty of press from food related magazines, but one reporter in particular on that day would prove to be a remarkable asset to the Lotus Sanitizing System and Hengsperger. Through the crowd, Hengsperger noticed a gentleman bearing a Time Magazine tag and was able to persuade him to come to the Tersano booth to witness a demonstration of the product. While the brief encounter seemed to go well, Hengsperger states that the subsequent follow ups went nowhere, until that is, in September when three people died of *E. coli* poisoning from contaminated spinach. Following that very unfortunate series of events, Hengsperger received a call from Time asking for third party validation that the product would effectively kill *E. coli* on vegetables and spinach as Hengsperger claimed it did. "We provided the information and then found out that we were named one of the best inventions of 2006 in [Time Magazine's] November 13th issue", Hengsperger states proudly. Since being recognized by the national publication, many doors have opened for Tersano. The product has been highlighted in other national magazines like Today's Parent and Canadian Living and chronicled in The Globe and Mail and The Washington Post. Attention has come from more than just print media, Hengsperger recently completed a taping of an episode of 'The Big Idea with Donny Deutsch', a popular American television show that profiles trend-setters and celebrities on CNBC, and Tersano's Water Sanitizing



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System has been selected as one of the finalists for a competition put on by Harpo Studios, Oprah Winfrey's production company. "So far we have been asked to send the product in for quality assurance, and they also sent the Harpo camera crew over to film us while we did a demonstration of the product", says Hengesperger.

Perhaps part of its sudden success can be attributed to the health and environmental benefits of the product. While the Lotus System is multi-functional and can be used for removing stains, mould and mildew and deodorizing, it is a completely natural, chemical free way to sanitize your home. It eliminates the need for expensive and sometimes dangerous cleaners, yet it is over 50 per cent stronger than chlorine bleach. As the president of an industrial facility, Hengesperger is no stranger to chemicals. Part of what triggered the invention of the Lotus Sanitizing System was what Hengesperger observed at Advantage Engineering. He noticed that his employees would voice concerns for their health while working with chemicals and would often request to see the material data safety sheets for further information. He also noticed that many of his employees did not seem to express the same concern over using chemicals at home and perhaps did not realize the possibility that they too were harmful. James Miuccio, occupational hygienist with the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers in Windsor is an expert on the hazards of household chemicals, "Many are respiratory irritants and skin sensitizers which can cause irritation of the mucous membranes. Some can cause allergic reactions," states Miuccio.

Many common household cleaning agents that are used by

Canadians on a regular basis contain ingredients that are detrimental to the health of humans. Bleach, for example is a strong corrosive that can irritate or burn the skin. Carpet and upholstery shampoos can contain perchlorethylene, a known carcinogen, and nitrobenzene found in some furniture and floor polishes has been associated with cancer and birth defects. The Lotus Sanitizing System eliminates the risks associated with toxic household chemicals with its all natural properties.

The product mimics Mother Nature and works in much the same way as a thunderstorm does, for example, the clean smell in the air after a spring thunderstorm is a result of the air being sanitized by the super-oxygen that forms when electricity is discharged through lightning. The Lotus system creates a mini electrical discharge to convert the oxygen in the water to ozone. When bacteria and toxins become exposed to super-oxygenated molecules, they begin to absorb them immediately causing the super-oxygenized molecules to break apart within seconds, killing the bacteria and toxins naturally. In a nutshell, it converts ordinary water into an extraordinary cleaning agent.

The super-oxygenated water in the Lotus system returns to its natural form in about 15 minutes rendering it harmless for disposal. The system significantly reduces pesticide residue on the surface of produce and is also a safe and effective way to sanitize small toys, pacifiers, baby bottles and diaper pails. It is based on the same method hospitals use to sterilize their instruments. The product may take a little getting use to, traditionally cleaning and sanitizing is noted by the harsh odours of chemical cleaners, but as Hengesperger says, "the smell of clean is not the smell of chemicals, the smell of clean is no smell at all."

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Developing the Lotus Sanitizing System required an immense amount of persistence and patience. The process took four years, and was especially difficult vying for EPA and Health Canada approvals since the product was entirely new. And although Hengesperger has invested roughly \$6-7 million in Tersano (the majority of which he says has gone toward research and development), he isn't exactly turning a profit just yet. It appears however, that Hengesperger's hard work and dedication may start paying off soon. At present, the Lotus system is available in three different forms. One as a multi-purpose bowl (with a slight resemblance to a vegetable steamer) and spray bottle. The second is the Lotus Sanitizing System with toothbrush bowl, designed for sterilizing toothbrushes or dentures, and the third is the Baby Bottle bowl suitable for bottles, nipples and pacifiers. All three retail for about \$170.00 and are available at Canadian Tire stores and will soon be found on the shelves at Costco, The Bay and Home Outfitters stores.

Hengesperger has also developed the Lotus Water Treatment system, which improves the safety and taste of drinking water. It is a two-step process that adds ozone at the first stage to kill 99.99 per cent of bacteria and viruses and uses activated carbon in the second stage to remove wastes, pesticides, the remaining ozone, and any other contaminants. The Water Treatment System though, is not an effective sanitizer, and in turn, the Lotus Sanitizer System generates about eight times the amount of ozone as the Water Treatment System and is not to be used for drinking.

While working hard to promote Tersano's current line of products, Hengesperger is also actively working on improving current products and creating new ones. At present, Tersano is developing a new and improved water purifier, as well as marketing a small spray-bottle-only model for the sanitizing system. The company is seeking feedback from seniors' residences, gyms, florists and a large Canadian restaurant chain as they move forward in their quest to develop commercial products.

With so many products and projects on the go, Hengesperger, company president, inventor and public figure still manages to make time to relax at home with his family. He is father to two children, daughter Hope, age nine and son Zane seven, who both motivate their father to continually try to improve the things around him.

As for Advantage Engineering, "I can't see giving up on Advantage, we're having fun growing with that business too", says Hengesperger. While he has had purchase offers, Hengesperger firmly reiterates that he is not ready to sell. "If anything I'd see about letting my managers become more involved. They deserve a lot, they've been great," he exclaims.

While Steve Hengesperger may not have known where his creative mind would take him, he does recall his inventor's spirit beginning to surface at a relatively young age, "Even in high school I used to say that I wanted to invent something that no one else had thought of yet, but that everyone would need", he says. It is safe to say that he is now living that dream. With all the attention that the Lotus Sanitizing System has been generating it stands to reason that the estimated 20,000 units sold so far are just the beginning. In time, the Lotus System may be adorning kitchens everywhere, or better still, incorporated into designs much in the same way the old countertop microwave has its own space reserved in most kitchens these days.



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