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**Drug giants selling herbs**

Big businesses dominate market for supplements

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the third in an Associated Press series examining alternative medicines.

By **MARILYNN MARCHIONE**  
AP Medical Writer

Some people who buy supplements to avoid Big Pharma drug companies may find themselves doing business with Big Herba, instead.

**Unproven Remedies**



■ **Safety uncertain**  
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Some of the same companies that mass-produce drugs in huge chemical labs also churn out vitamin and herbal pills sold in bottles with rainbows, sunrises and flowers on their labels.

Dozens of other supplement makers reap more than \$100 million in annual sales. One of the largest — NBTY Inc., on New York's Long Island — sold \$2 billion last year in the United States alone. Its brands include Nature's Bounty, Vitamin World, Puritan's Pride and Sundown.

"They used to be mom and pop operations but now they're major companies," said Bruce Silverglade, chief lawyer for the consumer group, Center for Science in the Public Interest.

There are hundreds of small firms, including niche players with only a few products. But they account for a slim slice of total sales, industry experts say.

Supplements often are sold through multilevel marketing — distributors and franchise holders earn commissions by selling and recruiting others to sell for a large company at the top of the pyramid.

Even many ingredient suppliers are multimillion-dollar firms that do business all over the world.

Little herbal stores are only "what the consumer sees when they're shopping," while the large companies that supply them are mostly invisible, Silverglade said.

**Homespun image**

The industry's little-guy, granola image has been a great marketing asset, allowing it to tap into Americans' frustration with big medicine, big prices and big risks. Supplement makers are dwarfed by leading pharmaceutical firms, whose drugs command sales in the tens of billions of dollars.

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**Not-so-'Poor Richard'**



**JIM STOUT**, Berwick Historical Society president, center, shouts to other board members, **Tom McLaughlin**, left, and **Dave Kovach**, that the society's rare almanacs sold for \$470,000 at Sotheby's in New York City on Tuesday. Part of the group that traveled to witness the auction was delayed in heavy traffic and didn't arrive until after the books were sold. Ultimately, with the addition of the buyer's premium, the unknown telephone bidder spent \$566,500 on the rare editions.

**Almanacs bring \$470G for Berwick history group**



**B**erwick Historical Society board members from left above, **Crystal Canouse** and **Lucy Szabo** listen to **Bill Vezendy** talk about the chronology and history of the rare almanacs as they take one final look after Tuesday's auction in New York City. **More photos, page 6.**

**Marsha Malinowski**, at right, senior specialist at Sotheby's, auctions some of the final items.

PHOTOS BY **TOM ADAMS**



By **SUSAN SCHWARTZ**  
Press Enterprise Writer

**NEW YORK** — It looked like a bitter morning for 14 members of the Berwick Historical Society, their bus trapped in traffic here at the moment their historic almanacs were being auctioned at Sotheby's.

But then Tom Adams' cell phone rang. It was Jim Stout, a society member who was already in the auction house.

"Wait," Adams told Stout. "Let me put you on speaker phone."

The bus went dead quiet, and then Stout's voice crackled: "It was just auctioned off. It went for \$470,000."

A stunned silence was broken by a gasp from Jen Nardi.

Sotheby's had estimated the books' value — including a first edition of Ben Franklin's "Poor Richard's Almanack" — at \$100,000 to \$150,000.

Instead, they turned out to be the second most expensive American manuscripts ever sold, according to Sotheby's. Once all the fees to the auction house were paid, the total came to \$566,500.

For years, the books sat anonymously in a cabinet at the society museum. They were only

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**Finally, mansion money**

**NEW YORK** — The \$441,800 the Berwick Historical Society will net from the sale of its almanacs gives members a chance to take over the Jackson Mansion, something they've yearned to do for years, said Vice President Bill Vezendy.

The Civil-War-era building currently houses Berwick City Hall. But the society wants to turn it into a museum, and restore it to the way it looked when Col. Clarence Jackson first built it.

Borough officials sounded interested, Vezendy said.

But first, the society — with an annual budget of \$5,000 — would need at least \$12,000 of steady annual

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**WEATHER**

TODAY: Partly sunny  
HIGH TEMP: 76°  
PRECIPITATION: 0%  
TONIGHT: Cloudy  
LOW TEMP: 62°  
PRECIPITATION: 50%  
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**Montour planting seed for community garden**

Residents eventually may be able to grow food in plots along Route 11 near Sheetz

By **CHRIS KREPICH**  
Press Enterprise Writer

**DANVILLE** — In these tough economic times, it would really help some residents if they could grow their own food, say Montour County commissioners.

That's why they are trying to establish a community garden — even if they have to wait until next year to get the idea off the ground. Commissioner Trevor Finn

■ **Bridge cleaning saved thousands** Page 5

said a resident told him about plots that used to be available on Danville State Hospital grounds for people to grow vegetables, and commissioners liked the idea.

They are eyeing about 3 acres of county farmland near Hopewell Park

along Route 11 across from Sheetz.

They enlisted the help of Ken Balliett from the Penn State Cooperative Extension to get the

Commissioner Trevor Finn Please see **GARDEN** page 9

**Three charged in beating that put man in hospital**

Suspects allegedly took time to get their story straight for police instead of seeking help for unconscious, bleeding victim

By **KRISTIN BAVER**  
Press Enterprise Writer

**FRANKLIN TWP.** — Shawn Litwhiler lay unresponsive and motionless on the ground for several minutes, his face bloodied after being stomped on and kicked.

But instead of calling for help after the savage beating, his attackers conspired

to get their story straight for when police arrived, court papers allege.

And William H. Gearhart Jr. later told investigators the assault was "just a boy thing" and "no big deal," police say.

Litwhiler's injuries landed him in the special care unit at Geisinger Medical Center for two days. He suffered multiple fractures

around his eyes and nose and had to be hooked up to a breathing machine.

Now Gearhart, 48, his son, Benjamin Gearhart, 23, and nephew, Juan Elizardo, 24, all of the Catawissa area, are facing charges for the alleged assault in June 2008.

Witnesses say the younger men beat Litwhiler for no reason.

But the alleged attackers claim they were just trying to protect each other.

It's unclear why charges were not filed until last See **BEATING** back page