

SATURDAY Canada: Troops give Day tepid endorsement. A12

TV Times: HGTV's men on a designer mission.

SATURDAY

OTTAWA
 Winner of the Canadian Journalism Foundation's
 Excellence in Journalism Award for the year 2000

CITIZEN

There is great hockey in Heaven
 Neilson has faith on his side in his battle with cancer. D8

Israeli boy lured to his death on Web
 Internet romance led teen straight to his killers. B5

Caruth convicted
 Ex-NFLer faces 20 years. C1

ESTABLISHED IN 1845

\$1.68+GST / \$1.87+GST OUTSIDE METRO

SATURDAY, JANUARY 20, 2001

Aromas Borealis

Bev Gray, aka Martha of the North, bottles the energy of the Arctic in a line of herbs, teas and cosmetics

By Bev Wake

You look at the snapshot and the first things you notice are the snow-covered mountains, then the dark green trees and, finally, Bev Gray's log house, the only home on an otherwise unblemished expanse of land.

Nestled in the boreal forest at Rat Lake, Yukon — 40 kilometres from Whitehorse and thousands of kilometres from anywhere else — the home is the subject of the photo, but it's the setting that beckons Gray.

"The land, I always feel like it speaks to me," she says. "I feel its energy."

And since she moved to Whitehorse, leaving her job as a photojournalist in Yellowknife, Gray has tried to bottle that energy and share it with others through the North and ultimately, thanks to the Internet, the world.

Through her company Aroma Borealis Herb Shop, Gray sells more than 200 bulk herbs and spices, a range of essential oils, herbal teas and vitamins, a cosmetics line and other natural products, many of them the culmination of hours spent gathering wild plants and herbs from around her home and transforming them into speciality items.

"I think the North inspired me," says Gray, a 34-year-old herbalist who's been dubbed the Martha Stewart of the North. Gray completed a two-year correspondence course at Dominion Herbal College in Burnaby, B.C., which has offered a chartered herbalist course for more than 70 years. She is writing a thesis called "Ethical Harvesting of the Wild Boreal Forest" to complete her master's



PHOTOS: JULIE OLIVER FOR STYLE WEEKLY

Bev Gray became known as the Martha Stewart of the North after she was interviewed by the Queen of Living's crew. Her story never made it to air because bad weather prevented the crew from completing filming.

her job as co-ordinator of the Northern Environmental Network, she would fill film containers with salves to share with other women. Eventually, these women called to order more. Then they started to inquire about other products. Her husband transformed her darkroom into a lab that eventually spilled over, filling two more rooms and a hallway, before Gray opened a store in downtown Whitehorse in 1998. Today, it's a family business, with daughters Ceilidh, 9, and Markie, 5, helping Gray gather flowers.

While the bulk of Gray's products are still sold in Whitehorse they are also available in some specialty stores, including Ravensara in Ottawa.

native to the North. Some, like ginseng which doesn't grow in northern climates, are imported from elsewhere in Canada.

About 30 per cent of the plants she uses are imported from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Quebec, Gray says, because she can no longer harvest enough to meet demand. But Gray's business has created a sub-industry in Yukon. Other residents, she says, are now growing herbs for her business.

Though her products may appeal to people in communities an ocean away, Gray says her focus will remain, as always, on the people in Northern Canada.

Her favourite product, the rose petal cream McCaul likens to champagne, was designed with the needs of Arctic women in mind, as was her line of Arctic Woman holistic herbal skincare. The northern climate, Gray says, is harsh and dry. Rose petals, by contrast, exude moisture in the spring and this is captured in the cream.

Then there's the Yukon Sled Dog Pad and Paw treatment. An elderly man who used to make a similar product retired and she was asked to develop something to replace it. She created an anti-bacterial, anti-fungal product that moisturizes, sticks to paws, doesn't freeze in cold temperature and tastes bad enough to keep dogs from licking it off.

There's also her nontoxic bug repellent, Buzz Off, which was created in part by watching nature to see what flowers the bugs ignore.

Manufacturing the products can be a lengthy process. Take Poplar Bud Salve, for example, the first product Gray made. The buds are infused in olive oil, which acts as a solvent, drawing out the medicinal parts of the plant. One of the active ingredients in poplar buds is salicylic acid, from which Aspirin is derived.

The buds sit in the oil for four months, shaken every day, and then strained. The oil, now infused with the poplar, is then mixed with beeswax melted in a double boiler. The beeswax allows the salve to solidify. Vitamin E is also added to help preserve the salve, which is good for itchy dry skin and conditions like eczema and psoriasis.

"One woman sends two big jars to her brother every year at Christmas," Gray says. "But, like anything, it doesn't work for everybody, because everybody's body is different."

When her girls were young, Gray developed Baby Bottom Salve — a blend of chickweed, calendula, chamomile, plantain and St. John's Wort infused in olive, almond and jojoba oils and beeswax. It's combined with lavender and tea tree essential oils.

Another product, called Wolf's Bane and made primarily with the bright yellow flower it's named for, promotes the healing of wounds, bruises, sprains and strains and eases muscular aches and pains. It's blended with almond and olive oils, beeswax and vitamin E.

"You can't have your finger on the pulse of everything," Gray says, "but I am in touch with the Earth."

Bev Wake writes for the Citizen.



From body balms to face creams and herbal teas, Bev Gray has home-grown a booming business from wild-harvested herbs.

degree. She hopes to become a certified aromatherapist this spring through B.C.'s Douglas College.

As a child, Gray was always keen to explore her natural surroundings as her family travelled from city to city to follow her father in the military. When the family settled in Ottawa when she was a teenager — Gray attended Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Cairine Wilson secondary schools and studied journalism at Algonquin College — she learned about Ottawa's native plants and used herbs to help cure her allergies.

Gray moved to Yellowknife in 1989, where she worked for the Northern News Service and Reuters. In Yellowknife she met her partner, journalist Mike Bailie. They moved to the Whitehorse area in 1992 when Bailie was offered a job there.

"The house was surrounded by all these incredible flowers," recalls Gray, who has returned to the Ottawa area to visit her mother. Seated on her mother's porch in Blackburn Hamlet, she sips a cup of her Arctic wildflower tea, a blend of elder flowers, spearmint, lavender, rose, fireweed and stevia.

As the aroma fills the room, Gray explains how she started to make salves for cuts and dry skin. When she travelled in