

WholeFoods MAGAZINE

Informing and Educating Natural Products Retailers On Dietary Supplements, Herbs, HBC, Homeopathy, Foods



Mark Blumenthal: Industry Icon

Mark Blumenthal, founder and leader of the American Botanical Council, located in Austin, TX, might be the richest man in the natural products industry. Even if this is not true in dollars, it is in places traveled, projects undertaken, and friends made *and* maintained. Mark's ability to connect with people, to entertain them, teach them, inspire them, provoke them, and nudge them to become better than they are is a skill so subtle that before they know it, their lives are intertwined with his. This is networking that goes to a level of caring for which few individuals have the stamina.

26

News

Study Casts Doubts On Omega-3 Benefits 8
Santa Monica, CA—The “boo-birds” are at it again. A new review study conducted for RAND Health, located here, has called into question claims that there is sufficient evidence to support a link between omega-3 consumption and a reduced risk of cancer. Granted, most of omega-3's reputation as a “super-nutrient” has been built on evidence that it can aid cognitive function and may help protect the heart against cardiovascular disease. Nevertheless, the headlines in mainstream media that have greeted this latest study focused on the cancer failure rather than on the positive benefits in the other two areas.

Negative Saw Palmetto Study Doesn't Discourage Believers 12
Washington, DC—Spokespersons for various industry organizations have raised their voices to object to a study that appeared in the February 9 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)*. The study, funded by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases and the National Center for Complementary and Alternative

Medicine, reported that saw palmetto berry was ineffective at relieving patients suffering from moderate-to-severe symptoms of benign prostatic hyperplasia. “The results from this study are particularly puzzling,” said Andrew Shao, Ph.D., vice president, for the Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN), located here, “given that more than 20 studies have shown promising findings for saw palmetto in alleviating” the conditions of men with mild-to-moderate symptoms.

Campaign Urges Defeat Of Food Uniformity Bill 18
Seattle, WA—The Campaign, a grass roots organization that focuses mainly on encouraging the labeling of genetically engineered (GE) foods, recently urged members of the natural products industry and the public to oppose H.R. 4167, the so-called National Uniformity for Food Act of 2005. According to The Campaign, which is located here, if the legislation is passed as proposed, it could repeal more than 100 food safety laws in over 35 states. Loss of these state laws, the organization said, would remove one of the “checks and balances” on the authority of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

- Expo West Show Issue
- Weight Loss
- Soyfoods
- Natural Body Care
- Pet Products
- Allergy Relief

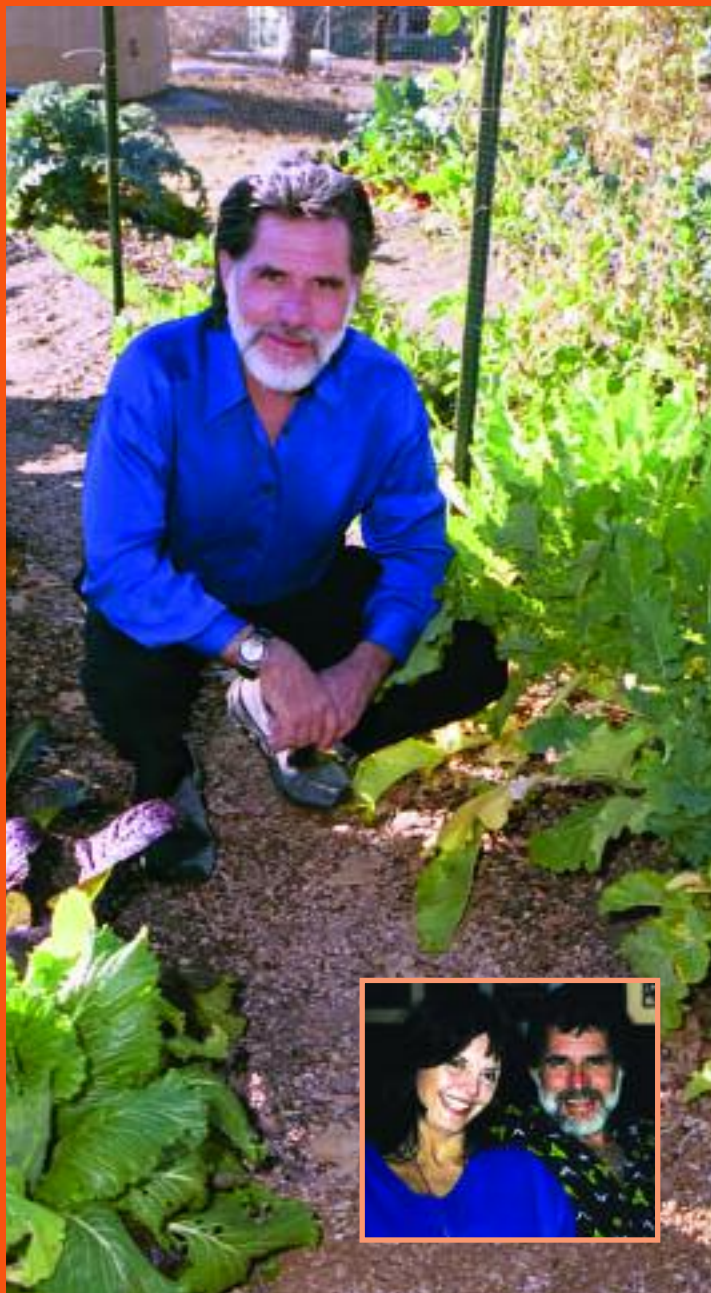
Mark Blumenthal

Portrait of an Industry Icon

Measuring his achievements in respect earned and friendships cultivated, Mark Blumenthal has built a mighty reputation in the natural products industry.

BY ALAN RICHMAN

(Inset) Jacquelyn Small says of Mark, "How can you not fall in love with someone who smells like lavender, peppermint, and myrrh?!!"



Mark Blumenthal might be the richest man in the natural products industry, if not in dollars, then in places traveled, projects undertaken, and, most important, friends made *and* maintained. Mark's ability to connect with people, to entertain them, teach them, inspire them, provoke them, and nudge them to become better than they are is not merely legendary, but legerdemain, a skill so subtle that before they know it their lives are intertwined with his, and his causes become theirs. This is networking that goes above and beyond, to a level of caring and sharing for which few individuals have the stamina.

In fact, the two most intriguing questions about how Mark pulls this off are when he sleeps, and, if you're his appointments secretary, *where* he sleeps. The answer to the first is rarely or never. And the answer to the second is in hotel rooms, hostels and friends' homes sprinkled across the country and around the globe (days before this was written he had just returned from a trip to Thailand and India and had already—more modestly—taken a short hop from his Austin, TX headquarters to a medical conference in San Diego, CA). In 2005, Mark spent over 100 nights on the road, and before the ball had fallen on New Year's Eve, he was already booked for 80-plus in 2006.

The irony is that Mark, the founder, executive director and driving force behind the non-profit American Botanical Council (ABC), is a man who is deeply rooted, family-oriented and who, on those increasingly fre-

quent occasions when he visits his aging parents in El Paso, TX, continues to sleep in the same room where he slept as a boy some 57 years ago. The furniture is the same since the early 1960s, he points out.

There are other ironies, too, in the life of this 59-year-old, shaggy-haired, shaggy-faced ex-hippy. For example, he talks at such a rapid-fire pace that he is often taken for a native of New York City (where his adult daughter lives), or, at least, for a transplanted New Yorker. The truth is that he is a proud citizen of the Lone Star State and a member of one of the oldest pioneer Jewish families in El Paso—despite having been born in Toledo, OH, and—cattle ranchers forgive him—being a staunch vegetarian for close to four decades.

Another irony: Mark is one of the most respected, most quoted herbal authorities in the world—the lead editor of two books in English on the German Commission E monographs and *The ABC Clinical Guide to Herbs*, as well as a longtime columnist in the pages of *WholeFoods Magazine* and editor of ABC's own peer-reviewed journal *HerbalGram*—and yet he has earned no advanced degrees. He has, however, received an honorary N.D. degree from the Canadian College of Natural Medicine, located in Toronto.

Meanwhile, the lack of a master's or a doctorate doesn't seem to bother Mark, nor hinder his accomplishments. In fact, once, after having taught a seminar at the Harvard Medical School and being on the faculty of an annual botanical medicine conference for physicians at Columbia University,

Mark Blumenthal Portrait of an Industry Icon

he teased his mother about one of the classic aspirations Jewish parents have for their children, saying, “I may not be your son, the doctor, but I am your son, who *teaches* doctors.”

That’s one of his milder jokes, and one of the few fit for a publication like this one. In private, Mark has far bawdier tales to tell, and many sharp observations to make. And despite his already alluded-to penchant for making himself lovable, he often assails people in mocking, shocking, confrontational conversations. Somehow, apparent under the challenge in his words, is the twinkle in his tone. So he gets away with it.

Yet one more irony: rarely in a suit, almost never in a tie, sometimes wearing sandals, he still evokes stylized memories of the rebellious 1960s (which took him from his early teens to his early twenties). Nevertheless, in spite of inhabiting the non-profit world for almost 20 years, Mark has a strong business head. In fact, it may be that his efforts on behalf of a non-profit organization that employs 18 people have made him *more* aware of the value of a dollar and a donor than he would be otherwise. Even so, Mark also understands the world of profit—via lessons learned from his forebears and in his own early career.

His mother’s father, Maurice Schwartz, an immigrant from Hungary, had a department store in El Paso, and during the Mexican revolution, Mark notes, “sold clothing and uniforms, and loaned money to Pancho Villa.”

His great-grandfather on his mother’s side, Albert Mathias, was a successful businessman who put up the money for and owned the first multi-story hotel run by and later purchased by Conrad Hilton, the beginning of the Hilton chain (a passage in Hilton’s autobiography, *Be My Guest*, attests to this, says Mark proudly).

This great-grandfather also was the original Zenith radio and later television distributor in west Texas and New Mexico, and, Mark relates, his father, Alfred Blumenthal, who emigrated to the United States from Germany, ran that business along with a wholesale furniture showroom.

Mark recalls that small Mom and Pop storeowners would send their customers to his father’s showroom where these shoppers could see a much larger selection than was available in the neighborhood outlets. The elder Blumenthal, who turned 94 in January of this year, never took advantage of having consumers on his floor by bypassing the stores and selling these “live” prospects direct. “It is unethical to compete against your own customers,” he told his son. This lesson was seared into the young man’s mind so that, years later, when he became co-founder of a wholesale herb and natural products business, he never considered moving it into the retail realm, as some other wholesalers and manufacturers have.

As a result, “retailer” is the one appellation that does not fit when describing Mark’s career in the natural products industry. Aside from that, he has done it all—wholesale distributor (Sweetheart Herbs), manufacturer (HotChaCha! Inc., one of the first companies specializing in Mexican foods), raw materials/ingredients supplier (bee products), author, editor and publisher, lecturer, and association executive (even before creating the ABC, he was a founding board member of the American Herbal Products Association (AHPA) and the Herb Research Foundation (HRF), and he was the third president of the now-defunct Herb Trade Association, the forerunner of AHPA in the 1970s. He has been (occasionally) an employee and (mostly) an employer, a minion and a manager.

Industrious from the get-go Mark started his first business at the age of 14. Already a licensed driver (hey, it was Texas), he handled two paper routes simultaneously, delivering 275 morning newspapers on a daily basis and 300 on Sunday. “I was making about \$150 a month as a teenager,” he recalls. The money was only part of it, however. “I gained a sense of independence,” he declares.

A few years later, in 1968, nearing graduation from college and almost certain induction into the armed forces during the Vietnam War, which he believed to be both ill-advised and unjust, Mark made two life-changing decisions. One, he took an “incomplete” in a course at the University of Texas, thus postponing his graduation and his call-up, and two, he decided to become a vegetarian, as both a protest of the war and “an affirmation of the sanctity of life.”

“Since that day,” Mark remarks, “I have tried to resist any system that would pay people to have them do something that I considered reprehensible.” That train of thought, plus the need to find a selection of nutritious vegetarian foods, led him away from mainstream supermarkets and to a

local Austin health food store where he became a regular customer.

“The store, on 6th Street, was named The Health Kitchen, and it was run by an old blind woman,” he says. It was in this setting, some three years before publication of Frances Moore Lappe’s historic *Diet for a Small Planet*, that Mark learned how to get adequate levels of protein from plant sources. Among the books that influenced him at this time were Joseph Meyer’s *The Herbalist*, Jethro Kloss’s *Back to Eden*, and John Lust’s *The Herb Book*.

A fascination with herbal medicine soon developed. “I’m self-trained,” he admits. “Never took a formal herb class.” Among the forces driving him to learn were his own inborn intellectual curiosity, but also the challenges from friends and family that frequently confront newly minted vegetarians.

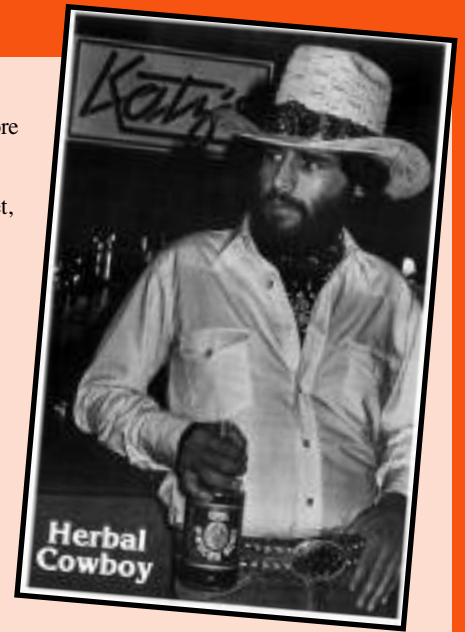
“I wanted to be able to answer the doubters,” Mark says, “so I began studying wild plants. Among the things I found out was that some supposedly toxic varieties were actually medicinal.” Ultimately, he proved so successful in his home-educated kind of way that he was able to form long and lasting professional relationships, as well as close personal friendships with such noted, credentialed authorities as the late Varro E. Tyler, Ph.D., Sc.D., distinguished professor emeritus of pharmacognosy, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, and co-author of *Tyler’s Herbs of Choice*. Tyler’s *Honest Herbal* and the textbook on pharmacognosy formerly used in pharmacy schools; James A. Duke, Ph.D., a longtime research official with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and author of *The Green Pharmacy* and many other titles; and Norman R. Farnsworth, distinguished professor, University of Illinois at Chicago, and editor of several books, including *Economic and Medicinal Plant Research: Plants and Traditional Medicine*, and one of the world’s most respected medicinal plant scholars. In fact, all three served on the original board of trustees when the American Botanical Council was launched.

Farnsworth says of Mark, “He has more energy than anyone I know. Perhaps his only weakness is that as he takes on more and more responsibilities and tasks the bubble will eventually ‘burst.’ He has to learn to prioritize his work, which is so difficult since he is always full of new ideas, areas to enter and new initiatives.”

Duke praises Mark’s “candor” as one of his most defining characteristics, and which, added to his “eloquence, humor, intelligence, quickness and attention to detail,” makes him an ideal traveling companion for a journey to Europe, Africa or South America, all of which are places Duke has accompanied him a total of at least 18 times in the past 12 years.

The Woman in His Life

All things considered, such attributes also make him a pretty attractive life partner, as Jacquelyn Small, the woman in Mark’s life, is quick to testify. Small, founding director of the Eupsychia Institute, a not-for-profit corporation teaching “an evolutionary model of healing the psyche ... through awareness, integration and service,” is the author of nine books on spiritual psychology and a fascinating individual in her own right. Of her relationship with Mark, she says, “We were married for eight years, divorced for 10 years, and now have been back together for 11 years. So we’ve obviously been down a few major roads of life in our relationship, and our story we’re willing to share with anyone.” (Mark likes to say that their divorce failed.)



Photo, © Bette Redman Reichman, depicts Mark Blumenthal in the early 1980s, posing at Katz’s Deli in Austin, TX, which is owned by descendants of the original Katz’s on Houston Street in lower Manhattan. Mark’s stance is a takeoff on John Travolta, as he appeared in the 1980 film “Urban Cowboy.”

Mark Blumenthal Portrait of an Industry Icon

Describing Mark, she says, “I can tell you he has all the markings of what makes for greatness. He’s intensely connected to the herbal/medicinal/nutritional movement that started blossoming in the early 1970s, is indeed one of its founders. He was the one who brought bulk herbs into the Mom and Pop natural food stores, carefully monitoring what came from other countries to make sure of their safety. He introduced much of the Western world to ginseng, to much of ayurvedic healing, and was one of the first communicators to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) about the regulation and political/educational aspects of the herbal industry. The now flourishing American Botanical Council and his beautiful magazine/journal, *HerbalGram*, started out as a newsletter on recycled paper in the early 1980s.”

In those days, Mark owned Sweethardt Herbs, and, Small continues, “His warehouse in East Austin was something to behold. Herbs were so unknown back then that the police and health department officials investigated him every year, believing everything in the warehouse was illegal and *smokable!* We used to laugh about their discovery of ginseng roots, rose hips, and *Gotu kola*.”

Small recounts her first meeting with Mark at a workshop retreat in 1976 when she was going through a health crisis. “I’ll never forget that long hair, halfway down his back, his dark eyes, and his intense warm expression as he took me out to his dark blue van and fed me a bunch of things I’d never heard of. And truly, whatever I swallowed that day did indeed start eliminating my symptoms! His passion then was to write a book entitled *How to Run a Business on a Shoestring While Wearing Sandals*. He started on nothing but faith and was an admired ‘magnet’ for large numbers of hippies here in Austin, offering jobs to many he met who were homeless.”

Over the next year or so, Small traveled with Mark all over Texas as he peddled herbs from the back of his van. “The smell was absolutely heavenly to be near,” she recalls. “How can you not fall in love with someone who smells like lavender, peppermint, and myrrh?!”

She adds, “You won’t find anyone more impeccable when it comes to offering herbal information to the public. Mark is a remarkable human being who found his passion and life’s work early on, and this passion has never faltered. He, John Mackey, the man behind Whole Foods Market, as well as the founders of Celestial Seasonings and Traditional Medicinals, and a couple of others, are indeed some of the courageous pioneers of the entire herbal industry that now sweeps the natural food and alternative medicine world. And I’ve finally learned to live with him!”

Tracking a Career

As Small notes, a nomadic search for customers for Sweethardt Herbs typified Mark’s initial foray into the natural products industry. His partners in that venture were Peter Steinhart and Peter’s wife Sara Sweetser, who, sadly, passed away recently at the age of 52. “Prior to that,” Mark says, “I had considered going into the natural ice cream business (should Ben and Jerry be thankful they never had to compete with him?).”

Mark also helped organize a consumers’ buying group in 1972. “My job was to go out one day a week to get raw milk on a dairy farm for the buying club. That buying club eventually merged with several others and has evolved into Austin’s longest-lived natural foods co-op.”

About this time, Mark also had his closest brush with retailing, albeit in an informal setting and on a part-time basis. “I was a beekeeper, and I sold honey and handwoven rugs from Mexico at a local crafts market.”

Sweethardt Herbs survived for 12 years, from 1974 until 1986. For three of those years—1980-1983—Mark also operated HotChaCha! “It was the first packaged salsa in the industry, and it had no salt and no preservatives,” he says, then adds, “I probably would have been a lot wealthier (*i.e.* financially) had I stayed in Mexican foods.”

As for Sweethardt, he explains, “During the mid-’80s, the bigger distributors were coming on strong. In order to compete, we would have had to extend ourselves beyond the resources that we could responsibly afford.”

Besides which, by this time, Mark had already begun publishing *HerbalGram* as a newsletter, and he was ready to reinvent himself and take on a new role as communicator and educator. “This was a calling that was more fulfilling for me than product sales. I’ve always liked to talk and to share ideas and feelings. Through the newsletter, and later the magazine, as well as through lectures and radio shows, I was able to talk to hundreds, if not thousands, of people at once. I was able to satisfy my itch to teach and advocate, and to analyze industry issues, including regulation.”

Mark admits to being a generally restless soul, “always looking for something that is new, exciting and different.” And while this may seem at odds with his deep love of family and roots, it is reflected in his frenetic travel schedule and may be seen as just one more contradiction about this complex man.

Moreover, this next stage of his life—now some two decades old—allows Mark to reach back into his Jewish heritage. As a writer and teacher, he reasons, he can more directly inspire and influence people toward doing good for others. “My parents always encouraged my younger brother Steven and me to live our lives according to *mitzvah*,” says Mark. “That’s the Hebrew word for commandment, but in common usage, it often also suggests good deeds and service. And they, and my grandparents too, were excellent examples for us. My grandmother Hedwig Mathias Schwartz founded the El Paso Lighthouse for the Blind. My mother Frances helped launch the city’s Visiting Nurses Association and also was one of the founders of Drive-a-Meal, a forerunner of Meals on Wheels. My dad is the oldest living past president of Temple Mount Sinai in El Paso, a position that also was held by my grandfather, two uncles and at least three cousins.”

As important as family was, and *is*, to Mark, it was not the only influence on his character. He also fondly remembers Mrs. Oppenheimer and Mrs. Maloney, two elementary school teachers who helped guide him through an accelerated program in which he progressed three grades in two years. “Mrs. Maloney was an Army wife, widely traveled, exposed to Eastern philosophy, and willing to open the minds of her students to new vistas. As a teacher, she was very demanding and pushed us to explore.”

Mark maintained contact with this inspiring presence throughout high school, college and beyond, even visiting her in the hospital when she was in her mid-’80s and in a coma. “I read Hindu spiritual poetry to her, and I believe at some level she heard it and was soothed,” he says, noting that after she passed on, one of her children invited him to deliver her eulogy.

Mark also had a “third” grandmother. As he explains, Ogar (a child’s mispronunciation of the name Hildegard) was a governess *cum* housekeeper, who was in charge of the maids, the cook and the gardener at his grandmother’s home. “She taught me how to ride a bike and to sew on a button,” he says.

The Tug of Texas

Another force helping to mold Mark into who he is today is the state of Texas itself. Unlike Mark, who is compact at 5 ft., 7-1/2 in. tall and weighs around 170, just about everything else in Texas is BIG! “I like the expansiveness of Texas. After a few days in a city like New York, I feel closed in,” he says.

Texas has given Mark two of his signature icons, much remarked upon by almost all who know him. One is his e-mail address, *herbcowboy@aol.com*. The other is a poster (see Page 28) depicting Mark in a cowboy hat, jeans and a fancy Western belt, which echoes the John Travolta poster for the movie *Urban Cowboy*; the poster, however, shows Mark holding Ginseng Rush soda, an herb-infused soft drink, instead of a bottle of beer.

Mark’s best friend, growing up in El Paso, being classmates in the same class in every grade, attending UT Austin together, and still close after more than five decades, is fellow Texan Marc Bernat, an attorney who is board-certified in estate planning/probate law and commercial real estate law. Commenting on their relationship, Bernat says, “But for my 54 years of best friendship with Mark, I would have been, and would now be, a simple left-brained, close-minded person. He has taught me, perhaps forced me, to be open-minded about people, concepts, feelings, life in general. Mark’s thought process covers all edges of the envelope; mine would stick to the glue. We are opposites and contrarians. Much of how I learned to adjust to other points of view came from adjusting to Mark’s persuasive nature. From puberty issues, Vietnam, new age and counter culture, to having children and marital relationships, to caring for our parents, Mark has taught me to be open and sensitive to the issues at hand and the context in which they exist.”

Bernat adds, “I share some of his passions (nobody would have the time to share them all), and he shares some of mine. We hike life together.”

Only a few people—*e.g.* Mark’s parents, some older family members, and a few friends from pre-kindergarten (yes, he does still keep in touch with them)—know him longer than Bernat; one of these is his first cousin

Mark Blumenthal Portrait of an Industry Icon

Maurice “Skip” Schwartz. Now executive director of the Audubon Canyon Ranch, which operates sanctuaries in California’s Marin and Sonoma Counties, Schwartz notes that as youngsters he and Mark, who is two years younger, were “co-conspirators, causing much consternation at Grandma’s table.” Not that they would do anything malicious: in those days, their idea of raising heck was to wear giant black olives on their fingertips.

Schwartz describes Mark as someone who, even as a child, had a quick wit and remembered *every* story. As a result, today his “family” includes just about every one he has ever met. “He keeps details of their lives in his head. He calls them on their birthdays.”

Mark comes by this ability “honestly,” says Schwartz. “His dad, my uncle, is well into his 90s, and his mental acuity and connectedness seem as strong as those of men half his age.”

Whither the Herb Business?

Energy. Imagination. Creativity. Again and again, Mark’s acquaintances—friends and family—return to attributes like these to characterize one of their favorite people. All these and more are needed as Mark strives to keep ABC solid, solvent and successful. Right now, he is doing this at a time when there is more knowledge and understanding of the benefits of herbs than ever before. Nonetheless, this knowledge and understanding hasn’t necessarily translated into higher sales for this sector of the industry. Why not? Mark, of course, has some thoughts on the matter.

“First,” he states, “we should recognize that herb sales are more depressed in the mass market than in the natural products industry. In health food stores, the core shopper has hung in there better than in mainstream

outlets.”

Nevertheless, there has been a decline in the growth of herb business, and Mark believes that “bad PR” is one of the reasons this is happening. As he puts it, “The claims that the herb industry is unregulated are untrue, but they have been repeated in the mainstream press on so many occasions that there has been a buildup of mistrust ... and this has caused some less committed and less confident consumers to be driven away from the market.”

Another reason for lagging sales, he says, is that some herb purchasers who have seen more *good* publicity than bad may have developed “unreasonable expectations.” Mark points out that while a few herbs have legal status as drugs—psyllium, senna and ipecac, for example—most do not, and they don’t behave in the same way that OTC medications do. In other words, he explains, they may need more time to act. Thus, when consumers try an herbal formula and don’t get results in minutes or hours, they may be disappointed.

The answer to both problems—the bad PR and the overblown expectations—lies in improved education, says Mark. If more research results were available proving the safety and efficacy of herbs and more attention was paid to teaching consumers how they should be used (and what will—or won’t—happen when they are used), then it wouldn’t be surprising at all to see a resurgence of the category that was once one of the hottest in the entire industry.

Not altogether coincidentally, Mark adds that the principal mission of ABC is education. He says, “I started this organization with an eye to transforming *HerbalGram* from a newsletter into a magazine. That part has been accomplished, and now we are facing new challenges.” **WF**

How Others See Mark

Nancy Moon, executive assistant to Mark Blumenthal at American Botanical Council – I met Mark for the first time at my job interview. Oddly, I wasn’t a bit nervous. He has a natural ability to make people comfortable. My first impression was that of a dedicated, driven person who understands that people and relationships are at the root of all successes.

As a supervisor, Mark is demanding, but never makes demands that are unreasonable. He sends out dozens of handwritten cards every week; everything from condolence notes to thanks for a ride to the airport. He makes literally *hundreds* of birthday calls a year; I’ve never seen anything like it.

I would love for the poor man to go on a real vacation, with no Blackberry, no computer, nothing. He is always working and needs to take some time to smell the echinacea. I’d be very happy to see him more willing to delegate, and nothing would please me more than knowing he’s enjoying himself. But then, he seems to thrive on the constant pressure and maintains a sense of humor through it all. Also, if his desk could flush, I would be a very happy woman.

Lynda LeMole (formerly Lynda Sadler), natural products and herb industry professional since 1972, was president and co-owner of Traditional Medicinal Herb Tea until 2003 when she became executive director of United Plant Savers, a non-profit education corporation dedicated to preserving native medicinal plants -

When I was with Traditional Medicinals and he was with Sweetheart Herbs, he sold our teas, we talked industry scoop and collaborated on many creative industry projects. He’s a brilliant, funny, big-hearted, fast-talking Texan herbologist extraordinaire who can probably tell you more about the herb world as we’ve known it for the past three decades than anyone else on the planet.

One of my favorite personal memories of Mark is when he honored me in front of the membership as I retired after four years as president of American Herbal Products Association. Being a past president of a trade association, he knew well the nature of the job. After many kind, flattering and touching words, he presented me with a distinguished plaque and said, “Being president of AHPA is like wetting your pants while you are wearing a dark suit. It’s a nice warm feeling, but nobody can really tell what you are doing.”

Terry Lemerond, former president of Enzymatic Therapy and now president of EuroPharma - I’ve worked on several projects with Mark and found him very articulate, and he has a huge knowl-

edge of botanical medicine. Mark is a person you can trust without question. He’s an old friend with a very high degree of quality and integrity. If this industry were made up of more people with Mark’s character, this industry would be looked upon by every other profession with envy.

Drake Sadler, co-founder of Traditional Medicinals - There is no other single individual who has contributed as much to the promotion of ethical botanical medicine in North America as Mark Blumenthal. Through his much respected relationships with the natural products industry, academia, the scientific community, government regulatory authorities, and the media, Mark is in a tremendous position of influence. This peer respect and broad-spectrum influence has been earned through his uncompromising integrity, so rare in all spheres of business.

Peggy Brevoort, former CEO of East Earth Herb, Inc., past president of AHPA and current president of the Board of Trustees of American Botanical Council – Mark’s most important character traits are his deep caring for others and deep commitment to his life’s work. His devotion to ABC is phenomenal. As I am current board president of ABC, I find this is inspiring, gratifying and sometimes frustrating. I have also been asked to comment on ways that Mark might improve. But I’m not going into that! Remember I just gave him his annual personnel review!

Loren D. Israelsen, executive director, Utah Natural Products Alliance - Years ago, Mark and I were at a meeting (topic now long forgotten). I mentioned I was just heading off for Europe. A few minutes later, he handed me a \$20 bill carefully folded into a triangle and said, “This is your *mitzvah gelt*.” When I asked what that meant, he proceeded to explain that when a young man was sent off from home in Eastern Europe, the village would pool a little money together to give to him for his journey. Mark said, “This is my tradition to you, which is to give this \$20 to someone you meet along your journey who is in greater need than you. The time and moment is of your choosing.” From that day to this (at least 15 years), I have carried on that tradition of giving my kids or close friends a little *mitzvah gelt* as they embark on a journey to keep a watchful eye for someone in greater need and to quietly pass along a little something to lighten their burden. Mark’s *mitzvah gelt* now lives on in scores of other people whose journeys in life have been changed for the better because of a simple act of wisdom and kindness. That’s Mark.