



Franklin inventor Denver Blanton displays a container of Denver's Stingstopper, a topical ointment used for the relief of pain associated with insect stings and bites. Starting this summer, the product will be available at participating Co-ops across Tennessee.

Story and photos by Mark E. Johnson

When the bee stings

Denver's Stingstopper is the result of a Franklin man's 30-year odyssey of inventing and marketing a 'miracle' pain relief ointment

In the summer of 1974, Denver Blanton, then a young electronics engineer for MCI, was working alone on a microwave transmitter in a remote, wooded area of upper Middle Tennessee when he was stung on the hand by a wasp.

As he rummaged through boxes of supplies stored in a small utility building, looking for something to treat the sting, Denver had no idea that this seemingly minor event would shape the next 30 years of his life.

"I was by myself out there and in a lot of pain," Denver recalls as he tells his remarkable story from a couch in his Franklin home. "As an amateur beekeeper, I was familiar with stings and

knew that certain chemical reactions could help to relieve the pain of the venom, and that particular sting was really bad. I can still clearly remember it today."

Miles away from medical attention and worried that he might be having an allergic reaction, the former Navy sonarman decided on a whim to try to create a home remedy that might help his pain. He laid out a two-by-four board, gathered all of the electronic and engineering compounds that he could find in the building, and began dispensing small amounts on sections of the board.

"I would take my finger and dab a little bit of this and that and apply it to the sting," he says. "There was nothing scientific about it at all.

I was just desperate. After several minutes of trying this, I stumbled across a combination that worked. My pain just abruptly ended, and the swelling started going down. As well as I could, I gathered up the compounds that I had used and took them home."

Several months later, Denver and his 8-year-old son, Mendall, were at home picking grapes from a small arbor at their Elizabethtown, Ky., home.

"Mendall apparently disturbed a wasps' nest built up under a grape leaf," Denver remembers. "I heard him scream, and when I looked, his head was literally covered in wasps. I'll never forget it as long as I live. I grabbed him up and jumped into our pool with him, hollering for my wife, Catherine, to bring the bee medicine I had mixed up. She did, and I doctored it on 32 stings on that boy's head; I counted them as I went.

"A doctor later told me that 32 stings to the head could kill an adult, but in seconds, Mendall stopped crying — his pain was gone. Within, I'd say, 30 minutes, you couldn't tell he'd ever been stung. Catherine and I just looked at each other. We knew we had something."

Helping strangers

Over the next 30 years, Denver spent his spare time mixing small quantities of the "bee medicine" that would eventually be known as Denver's Stingstopper and



Denver's Stingstopper is available in 1/8-ounce jars and the sanitary packets shown here.





giving it to friends, relatives, and strangers in need.

"I'd keep crude containers of it with me at all times during the summer," he says. "We'd go camping or something, and whenever I'd see that some kid had been stung, I'd walk over and offer some of the stuff. I'd just tell 'em, 'I've got something that'll help that sting.' More often than not, the parent would allow me to apply it, and I'd end up giving it to them. This is what kept me going over all those years. I just couldn't let it go."

During this time — as money would allow — Denver was also sending samples of his concoction to laboratories in hopes of creating a formula that could be reproduced commercially.

"This was very, very difficult for us," he says, "because it involved a large sum of money, usually two or three thousand dollars up front

and a similar amount after. We had three kids to raise, so it took a lot of sacrifice on everyone's part. The worst part was, we did this four different times before a laboratory landed on the analysis that worked."

And Denver's son, Marc, owner of BB's Barbecue restaurant in Franklin, says that he, Mendall, and sister Bronwynn were often unwilling subjects of their dad's experiments at home.

"Oh, we spent hours out in his shop working on that stuff," he laughs. "He actually sent away for mail-order bee venom. We'd put it on the end of a needle and prick ourselves with it just to test the mixture. And I'm convinced Dad kept those bee hives around just so we'd get stung and he could experiment on us!"

Support at home

After the Blantons finally received a correct laboratory analysis in the mid-1990s, the next step was to secure a patent for the invention, which they obtained in 2001, only months after Catherine died from a long battle with breast cancer.

"I can't imagine a spouse being so supportive as Catherine was to me," Denver says. "She never complained when we spent money on laboratories or when I would go spend hours at the Vanderbilt library to research patents. She never complained because she believed in what we were doing. After the incident with Mendall, she never questioned it."

Mike Fultz, a longtime friend and former business associate of the Blantons, had been using the home-made remedy for years when he reconnected with Denver in 2001.

"He told me he'd just gotten the sting medicine patented and was getting ready to put it on the market," says Mike. "Well, I always knew I wanted to be a part of the business if he got it going, so my wife, Margaret, and I became distributors."

As the Blantons and Fultzes began marketing Denver's Stingstopper in Tennessee, testimonials for the

year, Philip went to work for Stingstopper.

"I don't know. I just felt like this is something I could really sell because I believe in it so much," he says. "For me, the driving thing is kids. To see your children get hit by bees or fire ants and not be able to do anything for them is just a terrible feeling. Now, if we see our little boy get bitten by a fire ant, it's bad when it happens, but we know that soon he'll be okay. That feeling is worth whatever the cost of the product."

Denver's Stingstopper has also

gotten stung and ran some Stingstopper over to him. He put some on and, within seconds, he said his pain was gone. The swelling went down soon after. I thought, 'Wow — it really does work!' We've restocked it twice so far."

Exciting times

According to Denver, the spread of the product has been exciting to witness, with approximately 80,000 units currently in stores. Tennessee Farmers Cooperative began carrying Stingstopper this summer, and the product is available at participating Co-op stores across the state.

Though only marketed within a 200-mile radius of Franklin, the company is receiving calls from across the country and even overseas.

"It's been supplied for missionary trips to Southeast Asia and South America and is receiving great response," Denver says. "Here in Tennessee, electric companies, camping supply companies, and many Co-ops are stocking it, too."

When asked to explain how the product works, Denver just shakes his head.

"We just don't know," he says. "It was just an accident, and I can't explain it. We've had it tested time and time again, and no scientist or medical person can put their finger on how it works. We just know that it does work, and to me, that's all that matters."

For more information

To learn more about Denver's Stingstopper, inquire at your local participating Co-op or call (800) 325-1399. You can also visit the product's Web site at www.denversstingstopper.com.



"We've had it tested time and time again, and no scientist or medical person can put their finger on how it works. We just know that it does work, and to me, that's all that matters." — Denver Blanton

product began rolling in from farmers, camp counselors, fishermen, homeowners, and above all, parents, says Mike.

Philip Downs, a father of four and a construction subcontractor from Waynesboro, was so impressed by Stingstopper that he went to work for the company.

"My daughter, Tyler, who was 5 at the time, had been stung by a bumblebee earlier in the year, and I had been so frustrated that I couldn't help her," Philip says. "So when I saw the Stingstopper at a tack shop, I bought a jar of it. A few weeks later, my wife and I were preparing to take our 9-month-old son, Waylon, to his grandma's house. I'd been working on an old International truck for months, and we decided to drive it that day. We hopped in and slammed the doors shut and immediately, the cab was full of yellow jackets.

"Before we could react, one nailed Waylon on his finger. By the time we got back to the house, his finger was already swelling, and he was just screaming. My wife, Amanda, managed to get some Stingstopper on him, and the crying immediately stopped. He just looked at his finger. Within 15 or 20 minutes, the swelling was gone. We were just shocked, amazed."

For weeks, Philip, who had a background in sales, was nagged by the idea that he should contact the company to inquire about a possible sales position. After meeting with Denver and Mike in November of last

spread into the beekeeping community and is listed in the catalog of the Walter T. Kelley Company, one of the oldest and most respected beekeeping supply businesses in the United States.

Kelley Vice President Earl King recounts the first experience the company had with the product.

"Not long after we began stocking it, one of the employees in our wax-working department was stung on the ear," Earl says. "I heard he had



Waynesboro resident Philip Downs says he was amazed by the effectiveness of Stingstopper when he and his wife, Amanda, tried it on a yellow jacket sting suffered by then 9-month-old son, Waylon. Philip has since become a salesperson for the company.