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Santa Fe's Herbs Etc. is on a roll, with four of its herbal products — Deep Sleep, Chloroxygen, Singer's Saving Grace and Allergy ReLeaf System — rated best-sellers in their class, according to an industry group that tracks sales of herbal products.

"We've had three straight years of strong growth," said Daniel Gagnon, the owner of the business, which is on Rufina Circle in one of the city's few manufacturing areas.

Growth has been so strong, in fact, that Herbs Etc. bought a 10,000-square-foot building on Trades West Road and is remodeling it. It used to be the Capitol Moving and Storage building.

Just as remarkable, perhaps, is that Herbs Etc. had added 7,000 square feet just a year ago.

"We're getting ready to do dietary supplement manufacturing," Gagnon said in explaining the need for more space. "The FDA [Food and Drug Administration] has a whole code about what we need to do to manufacture those dietary supplements."

The boom in sales have made Herbs Etc. a favorite with the more than 2,000 retailers around the U.S. that carry the Santa Fe company's products, Gagnon said.

Herbs Etc. was started in 1969 by popular Santa Fe herbalist Michael Moore, who ran it for two years. Moore moved the business to California at one point, then returned to Taos and finally landed back in Santa Fe again in 1971.

"This October it will be 40 years old," said Gagnon, who himself worked for Moore and has owned and operated Herbs Etc.

for 29 years. He bought the business in 1982.

Gagnon, a native of Canada, has been a practicing herbalist since 1976. He obtained his Bachelor of Science in herbal medicine at the North American College of Botanical Medicine.

Herbs Etc. has a workforce of 27 in the factory side of the business and another five people who work at Herbs Etc.'s retail store on Cerrillos Road.

In addition to the new herbal products, Gagnon attributes the business's success in recent years to a "good stable workforce and the weak economy." He explained that people aren't switching jobs these days because of the high rate of unemployment resulting from the economic recession.

Gagnon toured the business recently with a reporter, pointing out the company's manufacturing equipment and processes that are needed to turn fresh and dry herbs — Herbs Etc. doesn't use powdered herbs — into effective herbal medicines.

"It is next to impossible to visually guarantee the identity of an herb powder," he said.

The company's herbs are grown all over the U.S., including those grown at an organic farm at Tesuque Pueblo.

Herbs Etc., Gagnon said, creates and tests many new herbal products.

As Herbs Etc.'s website explains, "Fresh herbs are picked from the fields and shipped overnight in refrigerated containers. We receive them while fresh the very next morning. Once released from quality control, the herbs are immediately ground to break the cell walls, put in an alcohol/water solution while fresh and vibrant. This process allows the release of active constituents."

"All of this started years ago in my basement," Gagnon said with a laugh, adding that the equipment he bought and modified with the help of several engineers reminded him of the eccentric candymaker Willy Wonka.

"We [both] like to design stuff," Gagnon said.

Herbs Etc. sells its products in a retail store at 1345 Cerrillos Road in Santa Fe, where it offers 250 varieties of bulk liquid herbal extracts.

The research and development that takes place in Santa Fe benefits a variety of customers, Gagnon said, including singers at the Santa Fe Opera who helped test and develop Herbs Etc.'s Singers Saving Grace throat spray.