

A FAIR DEAL

The Star-Ledger - Thursday, August 11, 1994

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HAWKERS PUSHING 'WIDGETS' AT SUSSEX FEST

It is called the **Sussex County Farm & Horse Show**, a place where you would expect to find cows, sheep, horses, tractors and produce. So what in the world is Alex Greenblatt doing here?

He certainly is no farmer; he seems unqualified to operate the Ferris wheel and he radiates none of the aura one often encounters in equestrian circles. In fact, with his silver-tongued, New York humor and bold friendliness, Greenblatt seems more suited to the late-night "infommercial" television scene where he could hawk products you never knew you needed. But there he was yesterday, squeezed into a booth at the **Farm & Horse Show**, doing just that. He was one of many **Farm & Horse** show purveyors wading the ocean of faces that pass, all of them potential customers, and his product was the Amazing Mini Sweep.

In front of Greenblatt was a small pile of debris. There was a screw, a couple of pennies, some pistachio shells, pebbles, a chunk of glass, sea shell fragments and a kernel of popcorn.

A fairgoer approached and out came the Mini Sweep.

"This will pick up things a Dustbuster won't touch," announced Greenblatt, even though the visitor expressed no complaints about hand-held vacuums. He wiped the little device across the pile of junk a few times and, sure enough, the Mini Sweep worked like a charm.

And it's only \$5.

In a voice tinged with Long Island vowels, Greenblatt explained he got into the business of selling doo-dads several years ago after retiring from three decades of teaching high school chemistry.

"I was a salesman for 30 years," he said. "I was selling education ... I got bored after two years of retirement and decided I had to do something in public."

Greenblatt said he and his wife earn up to \$20,000 per summer in profits from the widget sales they conduct at fairs up and down the East Coast. This year marks his fifth at the **Sussex County** event.

Time to stop chatting; a potential customer was eyeballing the booth.

"Folks," started Greenblatt, grabbing a Mini Sweep and attacking his mound of rubbish,

"This is that amazing little brush you've seen on cable TV ..."

A few steps away one found Sherry Bryner's stand and, like Greenblatt's, the cubicle had absolutely nothing to do with growing corn or breeding roosters. H & S Enterprises, owned by Bryner, is in the business of selling guns that shoot rubber bands.

Bryner was not around yesterday so the booth was being manned by her friend Sig Borstad of Vernon. He insisted the wooden weapons are nearly harmless.

Heck, he said, when people ask him about it he just picks one up, points it at their chest and fires off a few rounds. Sure enough, there was hardly a sting felt by a stunned reporter who took about four hits to the rib cage yesterday.

The guns are made by disabled veterans, said Borstad, and range from little 12-shooter handguns costing less than ten bucks, to an absolute masterpiece of engineering: the 144-shot, \$700 "Mini Gatling Gun."

Dick Bayles, a **Sussex County** resident, could be found a bit to the south of Borstad, right next to some politicians' outposts at the fair. Bayles was consulting a concerned homeowner whose darned tub had become so stained she was just disgusted. "You're an ideal candidate for resurfacing," advised Bayles.

And he was the guy to see, being the northern New Jersey outlet for Perma Ceram Enterprises Inc., a firm that resurfaces ceramic and tile with a "permanently bonded molecular chemical coating."

Bayles usually works out of his Hampton home but he has set up his booth at the fair for 11 years. "Fifty percent of my business comes from the fair," he explained. "Here, people can see and feel the product ... Sometimes they'll end up calling me in a month or even a year."

Walking around the fairgrounds presents a dizzying array of diverse merchandising. Steven Phillips, the third-generation owner of Phillips Steel and Aluminum Co. in Vernon - which has had a booth at the fair since the 1950s - said commercial vendors are as much a part of the fair as the hog show. "Fairs were really for exhibitors," he explained. "That's really what county fairs were."

Phillips refuses to give prices or make sales at the fair. John Wolfe, of Wolfe Granite Works, also prefers to sell his product, tombstones, from the main office instead of the **Farm & Horse Show** booth.

But if you have an urge to part with some cash, there are hundreds of vendors like Randy Curto who will enthusiastically hand you a wonderful "Multi Mop" for only \$14.95 with the promise, "You'll never get any streaking and your floors will be dry in half the time."