

The region's 'abuzz' about one local company's homegrown all-natural bug-be-gones

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In the midst of another hot and humid summer-in-the-Midwest season, one regional, rural-based company is harvesting the success of its homemade product line. It now stands ready to take the region's market by "swarm."

The product known as Skitopel® is a registered trademark of Angel Buck Corporation, and is headquartered in Bunker Hill, Ill. April Robbins and her husband Joe started the company as a small, family-owned business in 2019.

Skitopel's product lines include both insect repellent sprays and candles that are 100 percent all natural and handmade. Currently, Skitopel sprays are available in two different fragrances: lemon and mint. The candles are available in three different fragrances: Lavender, lemon balm, and mint.

"There are no harsh chemicals in our products," said April Robbins, who serves in the company role of president. "In fact, it's really unique in that every product has the herbs in them that we grow. They're safe for most all skin types and ages too.

"We started this because we have always been able to enjoy the outdoors bug free and want everyone else to be able to do the same," Robbins added. "We have heard from too many people that they no longer go outside because of all the bugs and

they do not want to use chemicals. It's sad to hear that people are choosing to stay inside and miss out on a lot.

"In 2023 we became certified as a woman-owned business by NW-BOC," she further noted. "All of our products are 100 percent all natural and homemade. The ingredients in our products include herbs grown and harvested by us. We have around an acre of herbs that we grow right currently. We are ready to expand that area as needed. We have been gardening and growing plants and herbs for most of our lives and have been able to enjoy the outdoors insect free.

"I have been gardening since I was very little having been taught by my grandmother who was well known for her gardening skills. I am now a grandmother and get to teach my granddaughter and her siblings just as she taught me," said Robbins.

April and Joe's company is a small family-owned business; one that began by them using their own herbs to make candles for themselves and eventually for family and friends – and it just kept growing as recipients kept suggesting they take their work to a bigger market.

Skitopel – a name originating from the words "mosquito" and "repel" – is now sold throughout southern and central Illinois, from Mascoutah to Springfield. Regionally, you can find Skitopel products in Alton at Bluff City Outdoors, Schwegel's Market, St. Peters Hard-



Joe and April Robbins, owners of Angel Buck Corporation and the registered trademark product line known as Skitopel, are standing out at their rural Bunker Hill farm just outside Madison County where they grow and harvest the herbs that go into their 100 percent natural, handmade insect repellent sprays and candles. Their products can be found in stores and outlets throughout central, southwestern, and southern Illinois as well as in Missouri locations. (Submitted photo)

ware & Rental, and at Woodland Golf Course. It's also in Bethalto at Ace Hardware and RP Lumber, in Brighton at Fish On!, at Community Seed & Feed Garden Center in East Alton, and at Joe's Market

Basket, All Natural Pet Center, and Fox Creek Golf Course in Edwardsville.

The expanding list of locations continues:

In Godfrey at Lockhaven and Rolling Hills Golf Courses; at DK's Market in Hamel; in Highland at the Highland Emporium, Big R, Rural King and Rick's Ace Hardware; in Maryville Feed & Home Supply; at both the Mascoutah and O'Fallon Ace Hardware locations; at Big R and Rural King in Swansea; Troy Ace Hardware; and at Belk Park Golf Course in Wood River. Skitopel has also entered the Missouri market arena, at several Ace Hardware locations as well as other venues.

"Most of our business is covered in Madison and St. Clair counties. We are actually located only two miles from the Madison County border. We attend the Alton Farmers Market, the Vine St. Market of O'Fallon, Maryville Farmers Market and Old Herald Square Farmers Market as well as attending many events such as the Horseradish Festival in Collinsville and Rt. 66 Festival in Edwardsville," Robbins said.

"We wanted to ensure that we were putting out high quality products, so we had our spray scientifically tested before we put it out on the market," she added. "They are proven to be 100 percent repellent, even at two hours. They repel mosquitos, gnats, buffalo gnats, no-see ums, biting flies, deer flies, horse flies, chiggers, ticks and more. Most anything that's going to bite you, it's going to repel."

Skitopel candles are unique in that they can be used both indoors and outdoors. "Indoors, the herbs provide a refreshing, relaxing atmosphere for the entire house, and outdoors, they keep the entire sitting area bug free," she said. "If you are going for a stroll in the park or woods, playing a round of golf, watching a ball game, enjoying a barbecue, gardening, camping, going on a float trip or just relaxing outdoors, Skitopel will keep the insects away in an all-natural way."

To learn more about Skitopel and to order online, visit www.skitopel.org. You can also reach out to April and Joe by phone at 855-523-2825 or by email at skitopel@gmail.com.

Construction on Vermeer Midwest expansion to start later this year

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Vermeer Midwest, a recognized merchandiser of heavy Industrial and agricultural equipment will be breaking ground on a new facility in Collinsville later this year.

Vermeer Midwest opened its current location on March 1 of this year. The new building will accommodate more storage space, training areas and service bays. The new facility will be located at 916 Fournie Lane in Collinsville, blocks away from the current building space located at 929 McDonough Lake Road.

Construction on the new building will be completed by Korte & Luitjohan Contractors Inc., and is slated to start within six months, according to Chad Soelen, general manager of sales and service for Vermeer Midwest. Doors are tentatively scheduled to open around August 2025. The facility will be constructed to allow for more space to better serve their customers in Southern Illinois.

"We want to be able to provide better service, closer service and be able to take better care of them, to keep their machines productive and profitable and up and running at all times," Soelen said.

Soelen said the company outgrew the current space that they are using, which led to plans for the expansion and construction of the new building. Vermeer's new facility will measure out at 15,000 square feet, which will allow the company to provide better service.

"We will have full capability with a showroom, parts stocking," Soelen said. "We'll have a full-service shop, a six-bay service area with cranes. We'll also have a cold service facility there to



A rendering of the expanded Vermeer Midwest building coming to Collinsville. (Courtesy of Vermeer Midwest)

store more parts, as well as yard space to store new equipment. We'll also have a training room so we can host training events for our customers, as well, so that they are properly trained on all the equipment that we service and sell."

Soelen said Collinsville is prime real estate for their expansion because it is centered with access to multiple interstate highways, which makes it easier for them to service multiple areas in Southern Illinois.

Vermeer Midwest got started in 1971, in Eureka, Ill., by husband-and-wife duo Junior and Beverly Kool, according to Soelen. They quickly became known for their personal approach to customer service and their interest in seeing their customers succeed.

Kool started with one store, and he built the business up where they currently have 11 locations throughout the Midwest covering the states of Michigan, Indiana, a third of Kentucky, all of Illinois and half of Missouri.

As a larger, multi-state operation, Vermeer Midwest brings additional value to its customers. All ten branches are linked together, creating a regional network of parts, equipment and technical service know-how. With a fleet of over 30 mobile service vehicles, Vermeer gives customers quick access to experienced technicians, parts and on-site troubleshooting.

At Vermeer Midwest they believe that customer service is not just what they do, but is who they are as a company, according to their website. Their culture allows them to do whatever it takes to maximize the customer's productivity and profit.

"We are here to provide for our customers' needs, take care of them and our biggest goal is to keep their machines up and running and keep them productive and profitable," Soelen said.

• Devese "Dee" Ursery is part of the editorial team at the Troy Times-Tribune, a Better Newspapers Inc. publication, where this story first appeared.