

# UNIVERSITY OF THE TREES Looking for something off the beaten track?

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By LAURIE SLOTHOWER

Sentinel Staff Writer

**BOULDER CREEK** — Looking for a present for the New Age explorer who has everything? Check these items:

- A dowsing kit to help "the serious diviner" find lost objects, missing persons, gold or treasures, for \$114;
- A Supersensonic Extractor designed to free people from the "literally thousands of toxic, unseen influences" and which can remove past psychic residues and balance chakras, at \$225, or;
- A set of pendulums which can remove toxic radiation, determine what plants are edible and enable the user to read the subconscious thoughts of others, for \$100.

These are just a few of the off-the-beaten track items offered for sale in the University of the Trees Press catalogue, a publishing house for devices you're not likely to find at Sears.

Founded by Christopher Hills in 1975, The University of the Trees Press was one of the first for-profit branches of the University of the Trees, a non-profit center for learning and research into consciousness.

In recent years, the publishing company has been overtaken in profitability by Microalgae International, the spirulina distributorship run by Hills. Spirulina is a protein-rich algae sold as a food supplement in tablet and powder form.

Research at the University of the Trees has produced works of publishable quality, according to a UTP press release, and the business was set up to fill this need.

Officials at the privately-held company declined to release sales figures, but in 1980 a spokesman told the San Jose Mercury-News that sales topped \$400,000 annually.

Deborah Rozman, vice-president of Microalgae International and a member of the University of the Trees Press spiritual community, says that today the University of the Trees Press has "minimal" sales.

The company publishes some 30 books delving into the psychology of consciousness, spiritual understanding, nutrition, energy and the environment. Most of them are written by Hills, and the rest primarily by graduates of the university (and, often subsequently, members of the spiritual community's inner sanctum).

Negative ion generators (cost: approximately \$99) purportedly screen out pollutants while sending healthy negative ions into the air to make it feel fresher and more alive. A popular item, these are now marketed through a separate company, the Negative Ion Research Center.

One of the best-sellers is Rozman's book, "Meditating with Children," which company officials say has sold 20,000 copies and is used by teachers and classrooms all over the country.

Cassette tapes of Hills' thoughts on life and consciousness are sold for \$8.

Hills' words have been recorded morning and evening for the past six years, according to a handbook for perspective members published in 1981.

The pendulums, made of wood, plastic and string, are made on the premises by University of the Trees group members or employees.

Rozman, a former administrator at the University of the Trees, acknowledges that the pendulums and related devices constitute "one of the most misunderstood areas" of the group.

But she maintains they are legitimate tools for those studying psychotronics and radiesthesia, the study of "subtle energies" developed by French Catholic abbays in the 1920s.

Other tools are to be used as biofeed-

back instruments which help people develop their intuition, she says.

The business is run as a limited partnership by members of the University of the Trees spiritual community. When group members are brought into the partnership, they sign a "code of practice" which sets into contract form what they have already learned as students of Hills.

According to the employee stock ownership plan on file with the County Assessor's Office, employees/members must not smoke or exploit other members of the community, and must maintain "good health practices" which avoid the risk of disease to other workers.

Furthermore, the University of the Trees Press may be the only business in the United States to contractually require its employees to put the interests of the business on an equal footing with their own, and to have a belief in the brotherhood of man "as expressed by Christian and moral principles in the world's major religions."

Partners also agree not to engage in labor union or political activity. Instead, employees agree to work for "group consciousness and unity and the resolution of conflict."

Rozman says that the partnership agreement was recently revised, but most of the principles — ideas set forth in Hills' book, "The Golden Egg" — hold true.

If Microalgae International, with its religious overtones and multi-level marketing scheme, can be called the Amway of the counter-culture, the University of the Trees Press could be called its Mr. Goodwrench.

And there's more: a bio-Q-ring, the modern-day equivalent of a mood ring, which for \$39.95 will tell its user when it's time to relax.

The Rhoda Rosita necklace, \$29.95 with a medium gemstone, which "amplifies the life energy" flowing through its wearer, making them "more positive and magnetic."

A Pi-Ray coffer or "wishing box," which amplifies the vibrations of everything inside. Cost is \$79. (A woman at the University of the Trees Visitor Center said a friend of hers had written down a desire for a new apartment and placed it inside the box and five days later he got his wish.)

The District Attorney's office has taken note of these items, but has no intention of prosecuting.

"If people make preposterous claims in connection with marketing a device, it is a violation of consumer fraud laws," says Assistant District Attorney Don Gartner, who handles consumer affairs lawsuits. Nevertheless, his office will not pursue it in this particular case, Gartner says.

When the county Department of Consumer Affairs was preparing its case against Microalgae International two years ago for alleged misrepresentation of spirulina plankton's attributes, "we made a deliberate decision not to go after these types of products because they were only being purchased by true believers," said Gartner. Spirulina, on the other hand, was being marketed across the country in general-circulation magazines like the National Enquirer and Runner's World.

The UTP devices "could be considered actionable if the claims made for them are false and misleading." But he stopped short of saying such is the case.

"We don't go after everything that is actionable," says Gartner. "If you have people on the fringe marketing to people on the fringe, does that merit a government response? We have better things to do with our time."