

# D | Local Business

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## MADE IN PALM BEACH COUNTY



Bill Svec, vice president of water and food products, leads a media tour at RGF Environmental Group in Riviera Beach. RGF uses a patented food sanitizing system and is experiencing a boost in business. PHOTOS BY THOMAS CORDY / THE PALM BEACH POST

# Riviera firm cleans up as sanitizing demand rises

RGF Environmental Group sells equipment to purify air, water, food worldwide.

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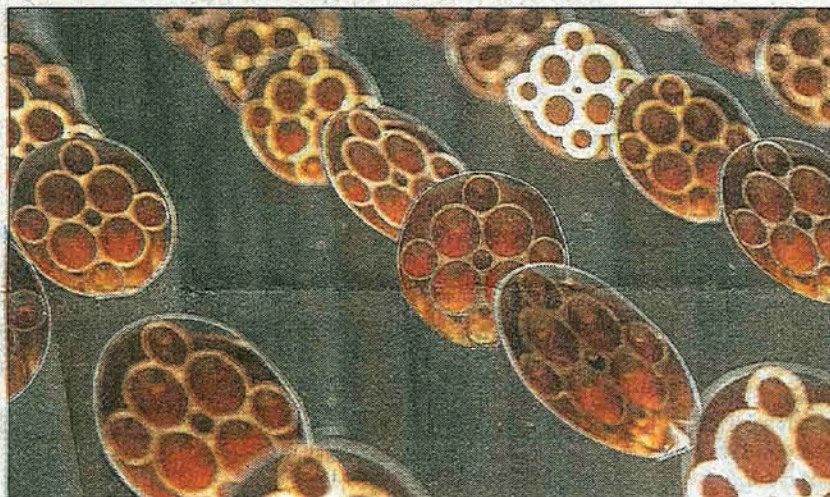
RIVIERA BEACH — Salmonella, E. coli, listeria and other similar terms have become unpleasantly familiar to consumers in the past few years as they learn of yet another outbreak of foodborne illness in the nation's food supply.

Three years ago the federal Food Safety Modernization Act became law as the government stepped up its efforts. The most sweeping reform of food safety laws in more than 70 years, it's designed to shift the focus from responding to contamination to preventing it.

RGF Environmental Group, based in Riviera Beach, has been producing a patented food sanitizing system for about 15 years and is experiencing a boost in business as more food processors seek its highly specialized equipment, said Bill Svec, RGF's vice president of water and food products.

Recently, RGF introduced an upgraded version of its PHI technology, short for photohydroionization. With its tunnel-style stainless steel construction, it treats all exposed meat surfaces resulting in a 99.9 percent reduction in bacteria, viruses and mold and also increases shelf life.

RGF's founder, CEO and president Ron Fink, 67, describes the technology as "an advanced sun lamp."



Machine parts wait to be assembled and packed at RGF. The company uses patented electromagnetic wave and hydro-oxidation technologies to kill bacteria, viruses and other pathogens in products and processes in a variety of industries.

The technology he invented spans across water, indoor air and food purification systems. No matter what the application, it's based on the same basic concept that uses ultra-violet light emitters and oxidation. UV light and ozone react with a catalyst that produces hydro peroxides. The bacteria is destroyed.

"We are shipping millions of dollars of product we make here in Riviera Beach," Fink said.

He started the company in 1985 after working for a contractor in the nuclear plant industry. Svec, who worked with Fink in the nuclear industry, has been with the company since its inception.

The 100-employee company manufactures everything at its 100,000-square foot facility on 7 acres where employees enjoy amenities such as a putting green, a sturdy ping pong table built at the

plant, shaded picnic tables and a koi pond with waterfalls. There's also a 110-foot company yacht, the Envision, that hosts both clients and charity events and serves as a showroom.

A 10-by-15-foot U.S. flag and the slogan "Made in America and proud of it" hangs in the factory.

While he declines to provide a total revenue amount, Fink, who holds several dozen patents, said the company shipped close to \$20 million in products to 33 countries, including China, where it has an office in Beijing, last year. But the bulk of its business is in the United States.

The food sanitation system is unique and sought after, Svec said, because it works and it uses no chemicals. Older methods of food sanitizing use chlorine and other

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# BUSINESS

## RGF

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chemicals.

"People are trying to get away from chemicals due to the cost, first of all, to purchase and store them, and also because they have to have safety measures in place. They want to go to a different type of technology," Svec said. "It's a very safe, friendly type of process."

However, Svec said, "You can never kill everything. It's just not humanly possible. You just reduce it, but you can't eliminate it. It is all about taking your sample before and after it's treated and making a comparison."

Food companies such as beef, chicken, fish or pork processors purchase RGF's systems ranging from \$50,000 to \$400,000 and run their products through them before the items are ground or packaged.

Chicken processors especially are facing a greater challenge as poultry has replaced beef as America's top meat product for the first time in 100 years. It's estimated Americans buy about 83 pounds of chicken per capita annually.

Government statistics show that more U.S. deaths are attributed to



Ty Huynh assembles machine parts at RGF Environmental Group in Riviera Beach. Companies such as beef, chicken, fish and pork processors purchase RGF's systems, ranging from \$50,000 to \$400,000, and run their products through them before the items are ground or packaged. THOMAS CORDY / THE PALM BEACH POST

poultry than any other commodity.

RGF recommends that poultry processors use a combination of plant air-purification systems and the PHI treatment system.

Dr. James Marsden, a professor of food safety and security at Kansas State University, said RGF's modular tunnel is the most effective system he has reviewed, and the process does not affect the products' taste or appearance.

Joe Maas, vice president of JTM Food Group,

Harrison, Ohio, said the plant uses RGF's equipment to clean the air as well as its products. All of its foods, such as taco meat, are sold cooked and frozen. School districts are a major customer.

"There is a list of things we do at JTM that help to ensure the food safety of the products we sell to the marketplace. An important one is products we get from RGF," Maas said.

Ask Fink how the company got started, and the story goes back to 1962 when as a 10th grader in

New Jersey his entry won in a state science fair. His project involved shining UV light on fluorescent minerals.

"Two suits came up to me and said, 'What are you going to do when you get out of high school?' They said, 'Come see us when you graduate,'" Fink said.

The men in suits were from the federal Defense Intelligence Agency. Fink became a technician and tested nuclear weapons in Nevada. He graduated from California Polytechnic State University with

## ABOUT RGF ENVIRONMENTAL

**Founder, CEO and president:** Ron Fink.

**Founded:** 1985.

**What it does:** Engineers and manufactures the latest environmental systems for air purification, water treatment and food safety without the use of harmful chemicals.

**Products:** More than 500.

**Employees:** Approximately 100.

**Awards:** In April 2013, RGF received the Governor's Business Ambassador Award for outstanding success in the export business.

**Fun fact:** The company yacht "Envision" is billed as the world's first environmentally friendly mega yacht. Employees built it by renovating a former charter boat. It uses several dozen of RGF's products.

a mechanical engineering degree. Then he worked for nuclear power construction firms.

He came to Florida in 1982 and installed the reactor vessels at Florida Power & Light Co.'s St. Lucie plant.

"I decided nuclear was going nowhere due to Three Mile Island and started my own company," Fink said.

RGF's first job was cleaning and recycling water used to wash Waste Management's trucks and trash bins. Its second project was cleaning oily water used on the City of West Palm Beach's trucks.

RGF's air purifying systems, installed in the air-conditioning ducts,

are its biggest segment, with demand from China a big part of that. The Chinese government used RGF's systems to help prevent the spread of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Avian flu.

Its newest product is an air purifying unit that fits in a car's cup holder. It's on display in the company's Lamborghini, an electric car known as the "Lamborgreenie."

The product billed as "like a flu shot for your car" will be shipped to Asia and also will be sold in the United States in about three months.

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