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## Innovative Family Business Winner

*Christa Werner Ulate, Randall Ulate, V. Alan Werner, Scott A. Werner and Terri C. Werner*



PHOTO BY JON P. UZZEL

**C**herith Valley gardens might have started as a means to an end, but the specialty jelly, pickle and sauce company is much more than that today.

In 1986, Alan Werner was a principal in an independent oil company. After the stock market plunge in 1987, Werner's family began gardening to make sure it had food to eat in the coming months. That gardening has since turned into a full-fledged homegrown success.

Fort Worth-based Cherith Valley gardens features a hot 'n spicy line of pickled vegetables, salsas, appetizer-oriented jellies, spirited fruits, grille and dipping sauces and gourmet syrups. The products are bottled in large and small glass fruit jars, reminiscent of homemade sauces.

Al Pugh, whose company does Cherith's accounting, nominated the family business because of its innovative way of taking an age-old practice and giving it a new spin.

All 40 Cherith Valley products have been developed by family members without using any artificial preservatives, colorings or flavorings.

"[The family] hand-packs a line of pickled products that would remind you of how your grandmother used

### **CHeRiTH VaLLeY gardens**

**Category:** Innovative Family Business

**Top Exec:** Alan Werner, president

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to preserve foods," he said in his award nomination letter. "[The family] found that people are very drawn to the feel of natural foods packed like your grandma would have in her day."

Alan Werner, who heads up an eight-member, family-centered management team, is the president of Cherith Valley. The company has 12 employees and since its start 14 years ago, Cherith has experienced a 2,235 percent revenue growth.

Over the years, Cherith Valley gardens has won 15 national and international awards.

The company's most recent award came in 2004 for

its Mango-Lime Salsa. The spicy concoction was named "Best Snack Food" at the Atlanta Gift Show.

In 2000 Cherith Valley won the "Most Innovative Product" at the Western Foodservice Show for its Green Olive Salsa. The Tamarind-Bourbon Grille and Dipping Sauce also earned the distinction of "Outstanding New Product for 2002" and the Apricot-Coconut Grille and Dipping Sauce won an award for "Outstanding Cooking Enhancer" at the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade's Fancy Food Show in New York.

Pugh said Cherith Valley is also supportive of its employees. On many occasions, he said, Cherith has welcomed children of employees and family pets in its offices.

"[The family has] allowed grandparents and a handicapped family member, as well as ... employees' friends and family members in need of financial help, to come in and do jobs that allow them to contribute to something that elevates their feelings of self-worth," Pugh said. "To help people in need is a part of [the family's] mission as a business."

— Aleshia Howe