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## Reporter's notebook: Who owns Bergen County-based beverage? Hyung Jin (Preston) Moon

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It seemed like a simple question. Who owns Ginseng UP Corp., a [Rockleigh](#)-based maker of an herb-infused beverage of the same name?



*Bottles of Ginseng UP, an herb-infused beverage made by a Rockleigh company with ties to the Rev. Sun Myung Moon.*

Rebecca Olles, a fellow reporter interning on The Record's business desk this summer, wanted to find out as part of a story featuring Ginseng UP's push to make inroads in the U.S. market.

While company officials were happy to display their product, they were vague about who owns the company, and its origins – basic facts business reporters like to know so we can tell the stories of commerce and enterprise.

Private companies are under no legal obligation to disclose anything to the public. Ginseng UP officials said the company was founded in 1981 and that it was owned by a "private group" they refused to name.

Our journalistic obligation to The Record's readers was to dig a little deeper, and solving the mystery eventually upstaged the story's original focus.

After reviewing public records and published news reports and making a few phone calls, we learned that Ginseng UP appears to be part of the global business empire headed by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the controversial Korean religious leader.



The Washington Times, a conservative counterweight to the Washington Post, has been perhaps Moon's most prominent holding in the United States. Moon, now in his early 90s, has been known in the U.S. for mass weddings at places such as Madison Square Garden.

So is Moon tied to Ginseng UP, which has appeared on shelves at Whole Foods, ShopRite and Walgreens in the past six months?

News reports from 1990 to 2001 have described the drink as owned by the Unification Church, Moon's organization, which has been redubbed the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.

A 1994 article in Food Engineering International cited the drink as a product of the Ilhwa Co. Ilhwa is a subsidiary of Tongil Group, which, according to its website, was founded by Moon. Ilhwa's website lists Ginseng UP as a product it makes and distributes.

But Lisa Lazarczyk, a spokeswoman for the ginseng drink, told Rebecca Olles in an e-mail that "Ginseng UP Corp. is neither owned by ... nor is it a branch of the Ilhwa" Co.

So I called the Moon organization's offices in New York. A church representative told me the organization had no legal or financial relationship to Ginseng UP. Instead, he said, Ginseng UP was owned by a group called UCI.

UCI is also known as Unification Church International, which has been described in news accounts as a business holding company affiliated with Moon's organization.

UCI is headed by Hyun Jin (Preston) Moon, a son of the church's founder who has become estranged from his family, the church representative said. (UCI didn't return messages.)

David Bromley, a professor of religious studies and sociology at Virginia Commonwealth University who has studied Moon's organization, identified Ginseng UP as one of its products.

"I don't think it's a significant part of the corporate empire," Bromley said, noting the organization was being divided among Moon's children. "It's one of their corporations, but they've got dozens of these."

Much of Moon's profits in the U.S. come from the sushi industry, according to Bromley.

Through a company called True World Group LLC, Moon's organization "builds fleets of boats, runs dozens of distribution centers and, each day, supplies most of the nation's estimated 9,000 sushi restaurants," The Chicago Tribune reported in 2006.

Moon's organization's activities are "funded in significant measure by the funds generated [by] and funneled through UCI," Bromley said. "So Moon is kind of a unique movement in the sense that he has created this corporate empire that is used to fund and underwrite the religious component of the movement."

True World Group, it turns out, is also based in Rockleigh.

And it just so happens a certain ginseng beverage company has offices in the same building, at 24 Link Drive.

A spokeswoman for True World Group said UCI owns that company, but not Ginseng UP.

But a shared office building must confirm a connection to Moon's organization, right?

Not according to Lazarczyk, the beverage company's spokeswoman. In an e-mail – her last before she stopped responding – she said "the only connection with True World Group which owns the building is that they rent office space in that building."

Small world.

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