



Jerry Minnich.
Photo by
Brent Nicastro

'I'm Also A Marketing Manager'

Jerry Minnich—"Dr. Plant" to the readers of his gardening column—was born in Allentown, Penn., in 1933 during the Great Depression. "Our clothes were tattered," he says, "but always clean." He spent four years in the Writers Workshop at the University of Iowa, graduating with a degree in American history. A longtime contributor to the Rodale Press' green-thumb bible, *Organic Gardening* magazine, Minnich has also had two books published by Rodale, *The Earthworm Book* (1977) and *Gardening For Maximum Nutrition* (1983); his Wisconsin Garden Guide was published by Stanton & Lee in 1975. He is married to mayoral aide Nancy Leazer and has two children: John, a senior at UW-Madison, and Becky, a junior at the University of Minnesota.

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"People who know me as a garden columnist get the impression that that's all I do. When my first book came out a reporter

came to the house and was really disappointed. He thought I would have a greenhouse, acres of gardens and the house filled with plants.

"I told him gardening was really a small part of who I was. I have a vegetable plot—30 by 25 feet—and I grow ornamentals, but I'm also a marketing manager for UW Press.

"You know, Rodale is located in a suburb of Allentown—Emmaus—and after high school I got a job there. Actually, my mother got me the job. She was in the Allentown Garden Club with J.R. Rodale's wife, Anna.

"I really didn't have any interest in gardening. My father had a victory garden during World War II and I picked bugs off the plants, but when I began writing for Rodale and *Organic Gardening* I thought I better get into it.

"Rodale had an experimental farm, garden plots. I didn't have a mentor or a teacher. I just stuck stuff in the ground and

that was it. We'd grow one plant with sun and water and then another plant without sun and water. We found out that plants didn't grow without sun and water.

"The first time I planted seeds and they turned out what they were supposed to be—well, it was as close to a mystical experience as I've had. They were tomato seeds—Rutgers. It's still my favorite.

"So I wound up writing a few of my own books and selling other writers' books. I came to the University of Wisconsin Press in 1965, and I love the challenge of marketing, of selling.

"I don't think I could market toothpaste or beer, but every book is a unique product. I approach marketing in a very simple way. Here is a book. First, I have to identify the potential purchasers of this book. Then, I have to reach them in the most effective, efficient ways possible.

"My job is to work out a marketing study for each book—a marketing plan—and you

really can't transfer, transplant from one book to another.

"For example, for Professor George Becker's book *The Fishes Of Wisconsin*, the market problem was how to find people who would buy a thousand-page book that cost \$75.

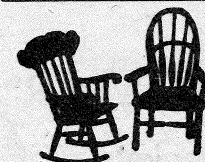
"We marketed it through direct mail. We sent out letters to all his former students—he teaches at UW-Stevens Point. We sent out letters to the professional ichthyologists. We sent out 8,000 letters to librarians in Wisconsin, Minneapolis, Chicago. We bought ads in *Fisheries*, a journal for professionals.

"One of the problems was demonstrating to people the sheer bulk of the book. I had book jackets overprinted and mailed them out—that empty jacket just cried out for a book.

"The result was that we sold 1,200 copies of the book—which has only been out for three months—and I think that's tremendous.

"Back in 1981, UW Press published a book called *Trout Biology*, which sold for \$19.95. It was also about fishing, but it had a totally different marketing plan.

"The author, William B. Willers, was a fish biologist, but he was writing in a 'popular



Listening In with George Vukelich

science' manner. To market that book, we went to the national organization Trout Unlimited and their local chapters. We bought ads in the popular fishing magazines like *Fly Fishing*.

"Two books on the same subject have different marketing problems. Each book presents its own marketing challenge, and that's the part of the job I really enjoy. Of course, at some point, maybe when the kids are through college, I'd like to get back to fiction writing—that's what I studied at Iowa. Maybe I could write *Attack Of The Killer Earthworms*. All I ever wanted was to be rich and powerful."