

# Aspen's bear buster finds some sense

By Charles Agar

Inside Business staff writer

John Buerger of New Castle is capitalizing on Aspen's summer bear problem.

With Roaring Fork Valley bear populations suffering from a natural food shortage in 2007, more and more bears are becoming habituated to human food, breaking into trash bins — and even homes.

And Buerger has come up with a deterrent he said is all-natural and does not harm animals.

"I actually teach a bear to leave an area alone," Buerger said.

His primary business is nonchemical weed control, but after spraying a garlic compound for insect control, Buerger discovered the formula worked just as well on larger critters such as skunks, raccoons, coyotes and — now — bears.

And in the four years he's been at it, Buerger has perfected his own cocktail of garlic, peppers and a few natural additives he said keeps bruins away.

Buerger protects his formula as carefully as a fast-food restaurant guards its "special sauce," but he stressed that it is more about how the compound is applied and maintained, and simply selling the bearproofing compound to homeowners wouldn't do the trick.

He sprays on a wet application of the compound, which dries, and when animals walk across a yard, they

identify the area with the harsh smell and taste.

"Once a bear or raccoon walks on that property, they go around it," Buerger said, and animals exposed to the treated area are not hurt but come away dragging their noses on the ground.

"My business is all no-chemical, nontoxic," Buerger stressed.

The compound washes off and "moves around" in the event of rain, but Buerger performs regular 60-day maintenance and said he can keep animals out for a season.

And he includes a number of property managers as long-term customers.

"It's a brand-new service," Buerger said.

"Most of the work I do myself," Buerger said, but he sometimes hires up to three workers on some days.

Buerger charges a flat rate for a late spring and then mid-summer spray.

Don Gillow, property manager for Aspen Valley Hospital, said he has used Buerger's services for two years with some success.

"It's a pretty low-dollar investment," Gillow said.

Gillow makes sure tenants carefully close and lock bearproof trash containers, and while some bears do come and rattle the bins regularly, he's had no break-ins in 2007.

"It seems to help keep 'em away. I can't swear by it, but it seems to work," Gillow said.