

Milton • Means Business

Orders pouring in for European-style duvets

Woman's love of comfy blanket turns into growing business

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

When Milton's own Betsy Horn travelled to Europe 20 years ago, she fell in love.

No, it wasn't a stereotypical European romance she dove into, but rather the soft, unmatched comfort of an Austrian duvet, filled seemingly mile-high with down.

It was, she said, like sleeping under a cloud. And, somewhat like falling in love, it was an experience she'll never forget.

"It's like heaven on earth," she said.

When she returned home, she tried to find the same sort of European-style duvet but came up empty-handed. It seemed they weren't to be found anywhere.

So she made her own.

Word got out, and before Ms Horn knew it, she had started up the Old Europe Duvet Company.

Now, 18 years later, thousands of customers around the world — from Germany to Japan — are singing the praises of these duvets and enjoying the same experience Ms Horn did in Europe.

The home-based business hires several local sewers who work part-time from their own homes.

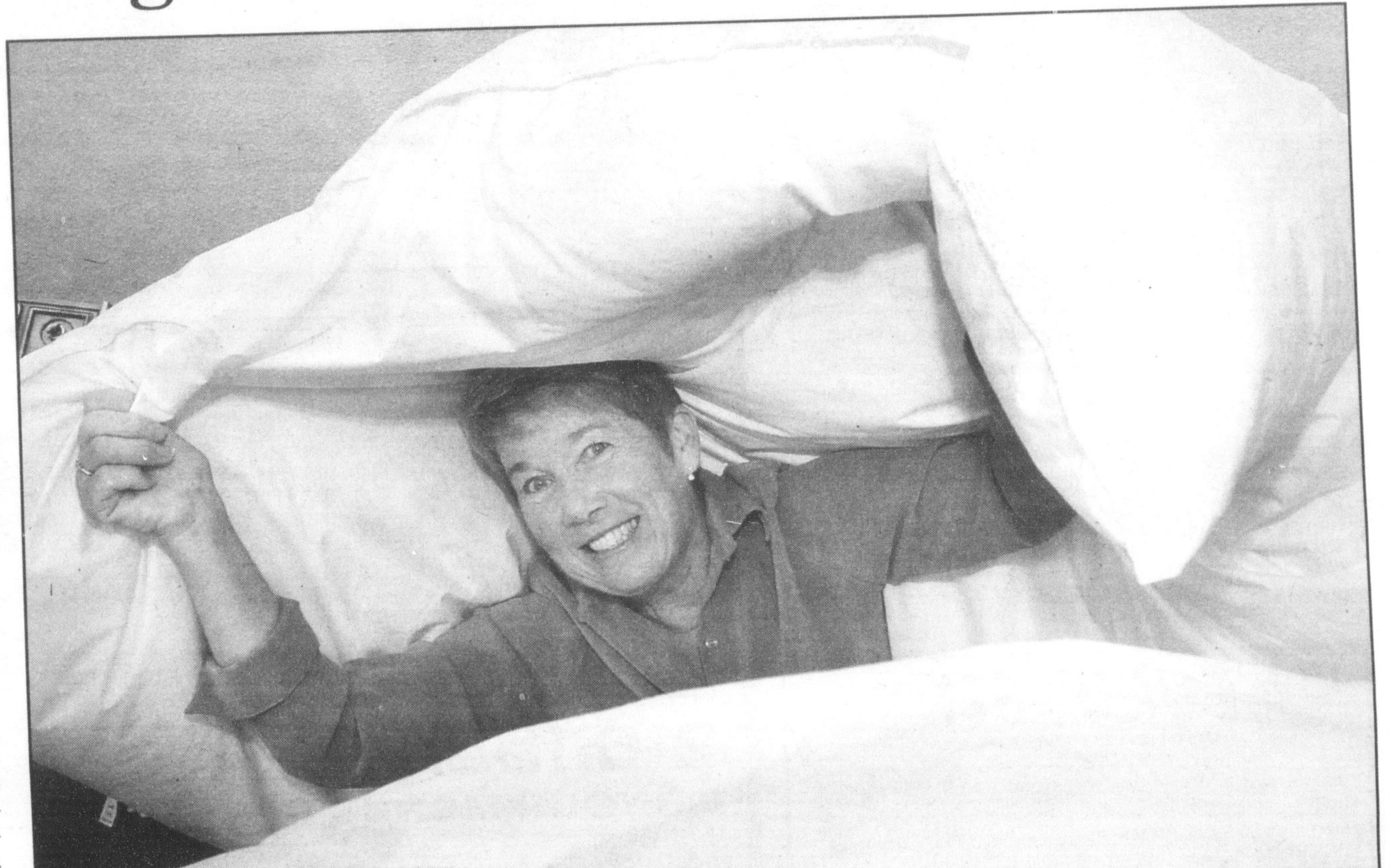
When the company was just getting off the ground, Ms Horn sold the duvets mostly at craft shows. About seven years ago, her computer-savvy son introduced her to the joys of conducting business over the Internet, and designed a site. It was then that the business really took off and the orders began pouring in.

"The business doubled and tripled with the Web," she said.

Now, 90 per cent of the company's sales are generated through its Web site.

The down duvets most people are familiar with here in North America are sewn in flat squares, which don't allow for much movement or 'fluffing up' of the down.

Ms Horn said her duvets are composed of long, high and wide tunnels, allowing the down to circulate freely and breathe. The more air



Betsy Horn peeks out from under one of the duvets she sells to customers around the world.
Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

that's trapped inside, the better the insulation and breathability, she said. Her most luxurious duvet fluffs to a height of 12 inches.

In times gone by, everyone in Austria and Switzerland had this type of duvet on every bed, filled with feathers and down from the barnyard geese, Ms Horn said. Since they didn't have central heating back then, it was an issue of necessity more than anything else.

Although the light-weight, yet warm duvets might not be needed for the same reasons today, Ms Horn said the comfort is unparalleled. She also said it's a healthier way to sleep, allowing a person to turn down the heat, snuggle under the duvet and breathe in cooler air.

The company offers three duvet models — the 12-inch high Austrian, the Bavarian, which is four-inches, and the Classic, a light, comforter-style duvet. They're available in twin, double, queen, king and wide king.

Custom weights and sizes are also available.

Each duvet is edged with decorative lace and hand-sewn and double-stitched for durability. It comes with a 20-year guarantee.

Prices start at about \$120 for a crib duvet. Old Europe Duvet Co. also offers down pillows, duvet covers and feather beds.

The irony that customers from Europe are purchasing European-style duvets from a Milton company isn't lost on Ms Horn. "It's also interesting," she added, "that I sell more duvets to Japan than I do to people in the Milton area."

She said she hears story after story of European-born customers who re-live a tiny

piece of their childhoods after ordering their duvets.

Many of her customers fire off e-mails to personally thank Ms Horn, she said.

"I get hundreds of e-mails. It's amazing. People get so chatty — they talk about how their dogs sleep on the bed and their children... You'd think it was some grand thing I'm selling," she said modestly.

Ms Horn said she hopes she can serve as an example to others that finding a niche and filling it is possible.

"I thought I could encourage others that starting small businesses can be done," she said.

For more information on available products, visit www.oldeuropeduvet.com or e-mail info@oldeuropeduvet.com.

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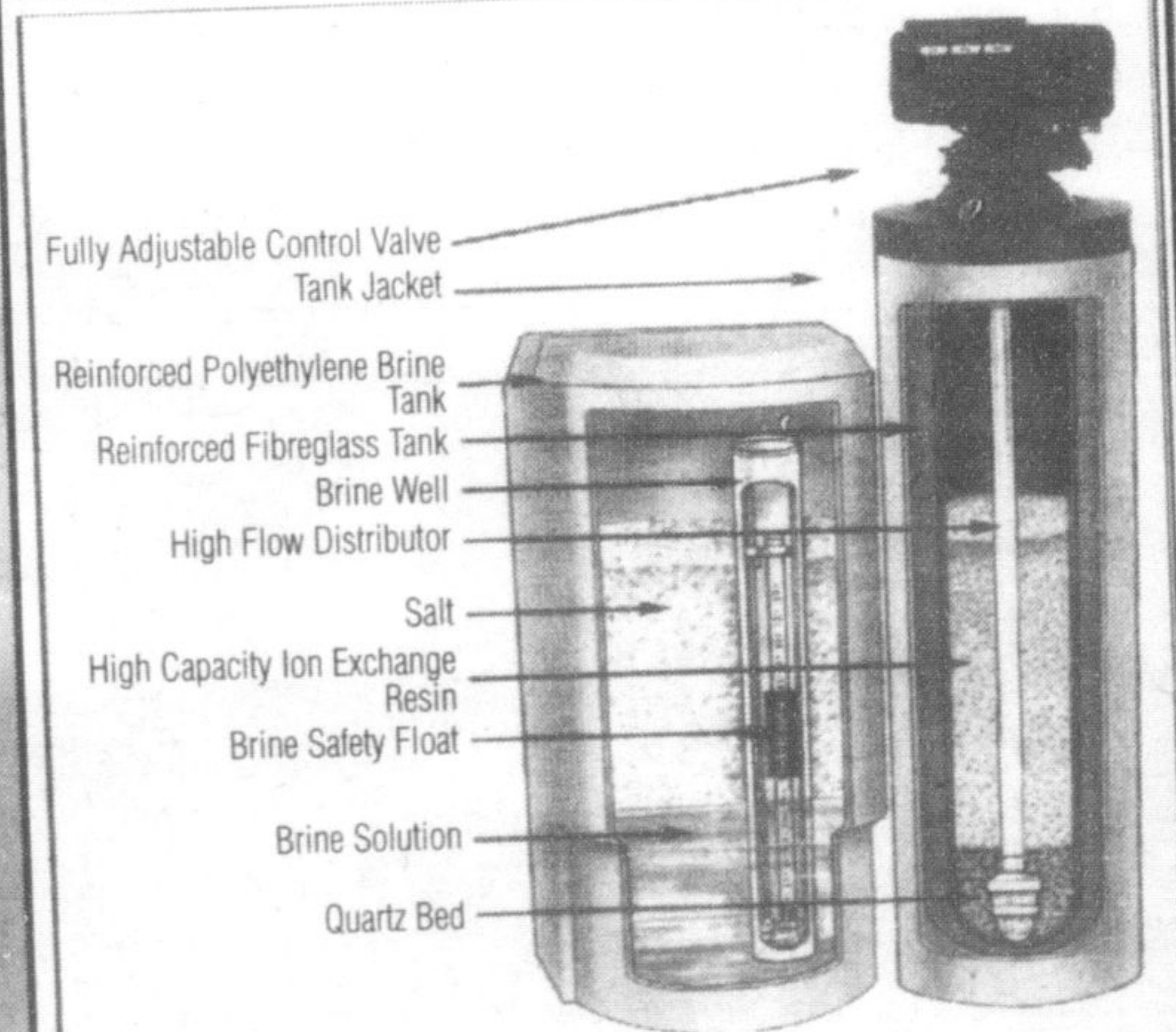
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