



# Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the  
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association

*fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping*



July, 2019

The July 9, 2019 meeting of the Fort Bend Beekeepers Association will be held at 7:00 pm in Fort Bend County's "Bud" O'Shieles Community Center, 1330 Band Rd., Rosenberg, Texas. Visitors (and new members) are always welcome. Membership dues are \$5.00 for the calendar year.

The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments if someone will volunteer to make it and clean up afterwards. It is important that we leave the Community Center the way we found it! Please lend a hand in straightening up the tables and chairs and cleaning up the refreshment area. We will be called to order at 7:30 after 30 minutes of social time. Don't forget about the *letgo* table in the back of the room. You may find just what you need or you can seize the opportunity to get rid of stuff (beekeeping treasures) that needs a new home.

## Ask a dozen beekeepers...

Here is this month's Q (from one of our members) and an A:

**Q:** I've been interested in beekeeping for a long time. What do I need to know about requirements for backyard beekeepers?

**An A:** Neighborhood beekeeping is becoming quite popular: it has been said that backyard honey bees are the "new chickens", but neighborhood honey bees are far different than noisy roosters or smelly chicken coops.

We recently got a call from a rural homeowner who was upset about a neighbor's hives along his fence. The bees would attack whenever he tried to mow or even just go outside. The fact is, he had little recourse other than hiring a lawyer. Fortunately, an awkward situation didn't develop. The wayward beekeeper didn't belong to our Association that is "fostering safe, responsible, successful beekeeping". We are confident that one of our members would have quickly resolved this issue before we got a call.

The first place to look for beekeeping requirements would be county or local government. Many neighborhoods are outside of city limits and we aren't aware of any specific county requirements for beekeepers. Of course, a zealous bureaucrat may interpret existing rules govern-

ing free roaming pets or responsible pet ownership to honey bees.

The most likely problem to occur is conflict with deed covenants and homeowner associations. We are unaware of any deed restrictions that are specific to honey bees or beekeeping, but almost all of them have a Catch 22: you cannot be a nuisance to your neighbors.

It is not likely that conflicts with neighbors in rural areas could not be resolved if both parties are "neighborly". In suburban neighborhoods, things can easily escalate to demands for regulations. If that happens, beekeepers may find themselves sorely outnumbered. That is exactly that is going on in West U right now with beekeeping regulations under consideration.

Whatever the situation, **be a safe, responsible, successful beekeeper.** It is probably better if your neighbors don't even know that you have bees. Don't be walking around in the front yard in a bee suit with a smoker burning. Be discrete in locating your hives, especially if the bees could interfere with a neighbor's outdoor enjoyment or lawn chores. Barriers like a fence or shrubs near the hive entrance deter flight path conflicts. Aggressively manage swarming and immediately requeen hot hives. Always have a source of water available for your bees and consider other neighborhood activities when you plan to go into your hives.

## Not Quite Gaveled Closed

Last month we reported that none of the legislation we've been watching seemed to have made it to the governor's desk. Actually something made it through under the radar without us knowing about it (not terribly surprising since that is the way the whole system seems to work). The "cottage food" folks like to produce and sell foods with little or no food safety rules (while more and more requirements get piled on commercial foods in order to keep us safe....go figure).

Texas food safety law includes a list of quaintly named "cottage foods" declared to be of low food safety risk. They can be produced in a home kitchen and sold with little food safety requirements. Governor Abbott recently signed a bill of cottage food amendments that added such as "pickled fruit or vegetables" to the cottage food list. But before the ink was dry, honey (and not just "pure honey" from a beekeeper) was acclaimed as now being a cottage food because it made the list, kinda. Buried among the cottage foods was "(xx) any other food that is not a time and temperature control food".

With this done in such a deliberate and sneaky way, beekeepers cannot help but feel xx'd. Honey from almost anywhere infused with almost anything will no doubt show up at a farmer's market near you. Jalapeno-lemon Chinese "honey" anyone?

## May Meeting Notes

Our head count at the meeting came to 74, but we had 70 names on the sign-in sheets. Don't overlook registering at our meetings since the sign-in sheets are an important record of our use of county facilities.

Our meeting time is 7:00 pm and includes 30 minutes of social time before being called to order. During social time at our June meeting Gene deBons demonstrated honey extraction ahead of our "Harvest Time!" program. Everyone had a chance to ask questions and check out the club's honey refractometer used to measure the moisture content of honey.

President Jack Richardson opened the meeting with an invocation and then led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. Eleven first-time attendees introduced themselves and were welcomed. One of the visitors, Tom Keith, was a special guest of Jack.

Vice President Danessa Yaschuk gave us a brief re-cap of our participation at Sugar Land's Earth Day Celebration. She also reminded us of the upcoming TBA Summer Clinic on June 22 in Conroe, the July 1st due date for entries to our club's Logo Contest, and of our Hive Decorating and Photo Contests in September.

Michael Parnell thanked club members who participated or attended the Elkins High School FFA Honey Tasting Event on May 13.

Our June meeting program was "Harvest Time!" presented by Jeff McMullan. He opened his presentation by remembering his long-time mentor and former club president Elton Reynolds (1920-2018). Several of the photos in his program were from Elton's guiding Jeff through a honey harvest several years ago.

Of course step one is to clear the bees off the comb of capped honey. Nectar that is not yet capped has too much moisture in it. Honey should have less than 19% water content or

it may ferment from yeast that is always present. Elton found it easiest to just remove the super frames one at a time and brush the bees away before placing it in an empty super. Other options include using bee escapes that prevent the bees from returning to the super once they leave. That technique is not usually recommended because it takes a couple days and the honey is left unguarded and subject to small hive beetle attack. A better option is a "fume board" using "Bee-Quick", a pleasant smelling product that drives the bees out of the super. Bee supply houses sell fume boards or Jeff showed how to easily construct one. Sometimes a final step is needed: using an electric lawn blower to clear the last few bees before going inside to extract the honey. It should be obvious, but everyone was reminded that you should never extract honey outdoors since it will attract zillions of bees.

The honey bee role in our food supply as a pollinator is well known. Another less obvious role is as the only insect that produces human food. A safe food supply is very important and in years past the only legal way to produce and sell honey was to have a food manufacturer's license and an inspected extraction/bottling facility. There are no specific food safety rules about honey, so common-sense basic sanitation applied. Most significantly, honey could not be extracted or bottled in a home kitchen. In 2015, Texas law was amended to allow "small honey production" by beekeepers. In 2019, honey became a "cottage food" in Texas so anyone can now buy in bulk and bottle honey (no beekeeping is necessary). Neither "small honey production" (up to 2,500 lbs.!!) or cottage food rules allow honey to be sold for resale or as an ingredient in processed food. There are very specific requirements for labeling and the sales transaction. It is a good idea to get in step with these rules since the rules apply to "sell or distribute" honey, which seems to mean that

even giving it away is regulated.

The TBA web site and "Real Texas Honey" program is a great link between beekeepers and consumers wanting to be confident in their source of honey.

Various methods of uncapping the cells and extracting the honey were discussed as followup to Gene's demonstration during our social time. Manual and electric "tangential" and "radial" extractors were explained as well as the importance of low honey moisture content. Bottling alternatives and labeling was also covered.

The final topic was handling the wax from cappings and the cleanup and storage of drawn comb in supers.

After drawing for donated door prizes, the meeting was adjourned.

## Treasurer's Report

Our June treasury balance was \$4,056.37. Since our last report we collected \$35.00 in dues, \$40.00 in extractor use fees, and \$50.00 in donations. There was \$229.50 in website expense. The resulting balance is \$3,951.87 (\$3901.87 in our checking account plus \$50 in cash to make change). Additionally, a \$50 check for two Mentoring registration fees was received by mail. The check will be deposited when a Mentor is assigned or returned if a Mentor is not available.

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