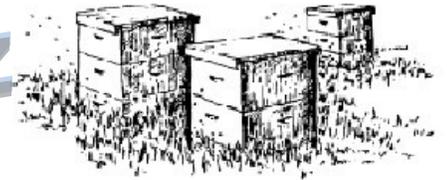


Fort Bend Buzz

newsletter of the
Fort Bend Beekeepers Association



April, 2015

The Fort Bend Beekeepers Association meets on the second Tuesday of the month (except December) 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). Our next meeting will be Tuesday, April 14. The Association provides coffee and lemonade for meeting refreshments while members volunteer to bring snacks. Thanks to Dona Tomplait for volunteering to bring salty treats for our April meeting (no one volunteered to bring a sweet snack). We still need volunteers for vacant spots on our refreshments sign-up sheet. After 30 minutes of social time, the meeting will be called to order with an opening invocation by Greg Pendley.

Ask a dozen beekeepers...

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

Q: I heard lots of good reports about helping with the Honey Bee exhibit at the 2015 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo AGVENTURE area. It came at a really busy time for me and I just wasn't able to help out. I really enjoy talking to people about honey bees and beekeeping. Are there other outreach opportunities in the works?

An A: The HLSR AGVENTURE honey bees always draw in large crowds over the rodeo's three week run. Volunteers from six area beekeeping associations engage the public by answering questions, often learning much more themselves about honey bees and beekeeping along the way. We're sorry you couldn't join in on the fun, especially since there is always the need for extra help with this event, especially in providing bees and setting up the observation hives.

The HLSR honey bee exhibit had been completely replaced for the 2015 rodeo. There were a few problems with the observation hives that will be addressed before next year, but, all in all, the new exhibit worked well. The beekeeper volunteers visited with thousands of guests as well as 2015 American Honey Princess (and 2014 Texas Honey Queen) Hayden Wolf from Big Sandy, Texas.

We all know that interest in bees and

beekeeping is growing. Hardly a week goes by without a news report concerning honey, bees or beekeeping. Our organization is often contacted by individuals torn between "saving the bees" and dealing with a colony that now lives in the wall of their home. Educating the public about honey bee swarms can go a long way toward preventing bees from becoming a costly pest control problem. Hopefully our swarm trapping project will help too.

We often get requests for programs or exhibits from community service organizations, church groups, schools, scouts, homeowners' associations, garden clubs or almost any other group you can think of. Business really picks up this time of the year. Jeff McMullan and Nancy Hentschel both now have observation hives that are a real hit with these groups. In the last few weeks, Jeff set up a honey bee exhibit at the Katy ISD's 30th annual Folklife Festival and Nancy brought her bees to Sartartia Middle School's annual World of Science program.

Similar requests come in to our web site on an almost daily basis. Many of our members have volunteered their time to help with this. As Vice President, Nancy Hentschel will be coordinating these many requests. Our plan is to forward email requests to the entire membership and build a cadre of beekeepers like you that are anxious and willing to talk to people about honey bees and beekeeping.

Meeting Agenda

In March, President Daryl Scott announced a new meeting agenda based on feedback he received concerning the way forward in his new role (see the March meeting notes article). Each month he would present a fascinating fun bee fact, a quick look at what beekeepers are doing this month and questions or comments from our members. VP Nancy Hentschel has volunteered to come up with a formal program topic each month.

One concern expressed to Daryl was the way we open our meetings. Nancy, Jeff and Daryl agreed that the Lord's Prayer is probably not the best way to open meetings of a fast-growing organization that is open to all in our incredibly diverse community. It was decided to just call the meeting to order and focus on what folks wanted: to learn more about honey bees and beekeeping, enjoy the company and make new beekeeper friends.

After our March meeting, there were several requests to reinstate the Pledge of Allegiance after an invocation of some sort. That is a great idea and our new plan is to open our meetings with an invocation delivered by one of our members followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. We will have a signup sheet for the invocation at future meetings and announce in our newsletter who will be giving it and leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

March Meeting Notes

We had 63 members and guests sign in at our February meeting. Thanks to all who signed in.

President Daryl Scott called the meeting order and began by expressing thanks to outgoing officers Albert Smaistrla and Herman Hoot. He presented each of them with a famous Perfect Pocket Hive Tool™ engraved with our thanks. Daryl then presented an agenda plan for future meetings. First on the agenda were fun bee facts:

Infrared light is visible to honey bees. And in its lifetime, a honey bee worker contributes 1/12 oz of honey to the hive's stores.

Next came a quick look at the beekeepers calendar for March. Spring flowers are coming into bloom and boxes in the brood nest should be reversed to give the colony room to grow. Empty comb should be moved to the middle of the brood box and supers.

The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo runs March 15 - 23. The AGVENTURE honey bees are one of the event's most popular exhibits and more volunteers are always needed.

Jeff McMullan gave a quick update on pending legislation affecting beekeepers (see related article). Find the status of legislation at <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/> with a search for the word "honey".

Daryl Scott represented our group at the Texas Beekeepers Association Winter Meeting on Feb. 21 (28 of the 30 Texas associations were represented). Topics of discussion included the new Texas Master Beekeeper program, mentoring and youth programs, the TBA Summer Clinic (June 6 in Conroe), convention plans for 2016, etc. Attendees also got a tour of the TAMU Riverside Campus Honey Bee Lab.

Our meeting ended with the customary drawing for donated door prizes. Thanks to the donors and congratulations to the winners.

Legislation Update

At our March meeting, Jeff McMullan reported that a bill was expected to be filed in the Texas legislature that would permit beekeepers to sell their honey within the law. In the current situation, there are no specific food safety rules that apply to honey, so the many food safety requirements for any commercial food manufacturer are applied to the beekeeper wishing to extract, bottle and sell honey. The facility must be licensed and inspected (the requirements prohibit the sale of food "manufactured" in the home). Jeff and Albert Smaistrla are the only two members that now hold food manufacturer licenses and both said that the Texas Department of State Health Services were very helpful in guiding them through the licensing and inspection process.

Three "honey" bills have now been filed in the current legislative session. SB 1766 and HB 3764 were filed by Conroe area legislators and are identically worded to exempt small honey production from food safety regulation. Honey sales of up to 2,500 lbs per year would be permitted for transactions directly between the beekeeper and the consumer at specified locations like the beekeeper's home, a farmer's market, etc. Resale is not permitted and the honey must be labeled as having been produced without food safety inspection. The two "exemption" bills have been referred for further consideration to appropriate House and Senate committees. "Local honey" on the feed store counter remains a violation of the law.

HB 2600 creates a new "home food manufacturing" category in Texas food safety law and includes honey in the list of permitted products. The law parallels the requirements for food manufacturing by extending registration, licensing and inspection to home kitchens.

Super Decorating Winners

Winners of our Second Annual Super Decorating Contest were named at our March meeting. In the ADULTS (20 and older) category, 1st place went to Sharon Moore, 2nd place won by Bill Windrow and Nancy Hentschel took third. Eleanor Murphy won 1st place in the KIDS category. This was Bill Windrow's second second place ribbon and he has vowed to take first next year!

Dues Are Due

Our membership dues are \$5.00 for the calendar year. Check out the address label on this newsletter. If your name is in *italics*, you need to get your dues paid. You can mail a \$5.00 check to Jeff McMullan, Fort Bend Beekeepers Association, 74 Hessenford St., Sugar Land, TX 77479.

Treasurer's Report

Our March treasury balance was \$3,428.34. At our March meeting we collected dues from 14 new and renewing members (\$70.00) and received a \$1.00 in donation from Jerry Emerson. We spent \$25.98 on hive tool engraving and \$20.55 on supplies for our Super Decorating contest. The resulting treasury balance is \$3,428.34, consisting of \$30.00 in cash and a checking account balance of \$3,422.81 .

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