

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

May 19, 2011

Beekeeping class has young, old abuzz

Hives help crops, produce honey

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Tags: Basic Beekeeping Class beekeepers bees Inland Empire Beekeepers Association Joan Nolan WSU Home Extension



Jerry Tate shows some bees to Nathan Headrick, 8, and his sister Rebekah, 6.

Beekeeping information

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inlandbeemail.com

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Joan Nolan at (509) 924-3652.

Things were buzzing April 30 on the grounds of the WSU Home Extension campus, as beginning beekeepers got an up-close look at active hives. This second field day of the basic beekeeping class sponsored by WSU Home Extension and the Inland Empire Beekeepers Association (IEBA) offered novice beekeepers hands-on experience.

The class is open to all ages. As Rebekah Headrick, 6, watched a bee slowly crawl along her gloved finger, her 8-year-old brother Nathan said, "My sister is very shy, but I'm not!"

He adjusted his beekeeper's hat and added, "I also know something about bees."

Nathan and Rebekah are taking the class with their parents Melody and Ty Headrick. "We have a small farm – just vegetables – out by Fairchild," Melody Headrick said. "We sell tomatoes, peppers, potatoes and eggs at local farmers markets."

Nathan demonstrated his bee knowledge. "We need bees to pollinate," he said.

Indeed, many of the folks who signed up for the class hope that adding beehives to their gardens will result in more abundant harvests.

Joan Nolan, WSU Extension/IEBA liaison said, "Interest in beekeeping goes hand in hand

with backyard gardening.”

That’s why Charlotte Pegoraro from Coeur d’ Alene signed up, despite not being fond of flying insects. Her son had once stumbled into a yellow jacket nest and been badly bitten. “It took a couple minutes on that first field day to resist the urge to duck and swat!” she said, laughing.

Her vegetables failed to thrive last season, but she said she anticipates an abundant yield this year because she’s already installed a hive near her garden. “My plum tree just finished blooming and the noise (from the bees) when I stand under it is amazing.”

Asked if her son shares her enthusiasm, she said, “He’s now two-hands deep in the honeybee hive!”

It’s an area of interest to many, said, Nolan who’s watched enrollment in the course soar. The class has been offered for several years. “We always fill up, but last year we had 100 take the class and this year we had 154.”

In addition to the increase among avid gardeners, Nolan said a greater awareness of colony collapse disorder has sparked concern.

According to the USDA, in 2006 beekeepers began reporting losses of 30 to 90 percent of their hives. Agriculture research scientists are working to discover the cause, but in the meantime the declining bee population poses a significant threat to fruit and vegetable crops dependent on insect pollination.

Jerry Tate of Tate’s Honey Farm is one of the basic beekeeping volunteer instructorAs. He said without enough bees, “We could lose over 90 varieties of fruits and vegetables. Without bees there’d be no cherry or berry crops.”

Others have a sweeter reason for taking the class: “I love honey,” said Dana Eagle of Chattaroy. “What better way to get it than to make your own?”

Leishalyn Rich, 15, agreed. Five years ago she took the course with her dad. “I was an eager 10-year-old,” she said. “It sounded so cool to keep bees in my backyard and to make honey!”

Rich started with eight hives that first year, which produced four gallons of honey. The next

year she expanded to 16 hives and launched Wild-n-Sweet Rich Honey. Currently, the entrepreneurial freshman at Lewis and Clark sells her honey at Perry Street Market and several other local farmers markets. And she remains enthralled by bees.

“I like being in the hives,” Rich said. “Bees are fantastic. Their social hierarchy is fascinating.”

She explained, “You get those bees that hatch at the bottom of the pile – they’re the newbies. They get the dirty job of cleaning up the hives. Then there’s the queen – you can see the other bees grooming her, feeding her and keeping her warm. They understand the queen is majorly important.”

In addition to honey, Rich now makes and sells beeswax candles. She’s harvesting great benefits from the class she took as a 10-year-old. “I’m extremely happy I got into beekeeping,” she said. “I’m hoping this will pay for my college education.”

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