for Seniors only!

National Honey Bee Day!

AUGUST 19TH

Beekeeper Bob Mathis suits up and uses a smoker when checking on his bees.

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AUGUST 19 IS NATIONAL HONEY BEE DAY!

Bees are Some of the World's Busiest – and Most Valuable – Insects!

Keeping bees is not difficult – but it's a good idea to know what you're doing before you get involved

By Elizabeth Bergstone

Bob Mathis began keeping bees after he retired when a neighbor convinced him that beekeeping was easy, didn't really require a lot of work or much heavy lifting, and could be a fun and interesting hobby. Bob decided to learn all he could about beekeeping, so he signed up for the Forsyth County Beekeepers Association (FCBA) Bee School.

The course is conducted by experienced beekeepers who are all members of the FCBA. In addition to the theory of beekeeping taught in the classroom, each student is assigned an experienced beekeeper as a mentor, who gives the student hands-on training at his own hives. Armed with his new-found knowledge, Bob joined the ranks of the beekeeping profession – one that has been practiced by humans for millennia.

Human beekeeping was practiced as far back as in Ancient Egypt, where beekeepers were depicted on tombs. There are more than 20,000 known species of bees, but the most well-known of these is the honey bee. The type of honey bee most widely known in North America actually originated in Asia but, since it was brought to this country by colonists from Europe, it is known as the European honey bee. It is the primary species maintained by beekeepers, not only for the value of the honey it produces, but also for its value as a crop pollinator. An estimated one third of the global human food supply is mostly pollinated by bees. The value of the bees' crop pollination in the U.S. alone is estimated at fifteen billion dollars annually.

Bob Mathis' beekeeping operation has been quite successful. Currently Bob keeps twenty-four hives, from which he can harvest up to seventy pounds of honey annually. Each hive contains several frames on which the bees build honeycomb, filling it with honey throughout the summer. By late summer, the frames are loaded with honey. The honey is then bottled and labeled and sold at farmers markets such as the one held on Wednesdays in front of the YMCA in King.

Bob's locally-produced honey is in high demand by shoppers at the farmers markets where he and his wife set up their stall. He places all the proceeds from the sale of his honey in his granddaughter's college fund. He named his bee farm after her – Lil Sarah's Bee Farm.

Elizabeth Bergstone is the former editor of the Downtown Winston-Salem newspaper. She has written for numerous local publications including the Winston-Salem Journal. Currently she works as a voiceover actor and an audio book narrator.

For those wishing to get a taste of what beekeeping entails, Bob will be teaching a two-hour class on "Bees and Honey" at the **Forsyth Tech Stokes County Center** from **6 – 8 p.m. August 1.** The class is free, but pre-registration is required; call 336-593-5402, ext. 1704.

The FCBA Bee School is held annually. It is a five-week course which meets on **Saturday** from **9 a.m. – 12 noon** at the Forsyth County Agricultural Extension Office at 1450 Fairchild Road in W-S. For more info: **ForsythCountyBeeKeepers.org**.