

Lamorinda OUR HOMES

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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

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After Tough Winter, Good Buzz So Far *Update on the local honey business*

By Cathy Tyson



Hive inspection

Photos Cathy Tyson

Last year was challenging for Lamorinda bees. Mike Vigo, also known as the Bee Rancher, described 2012 as “one of the more difficult years of beekeeping,” but he says he is looking forward to the spring nectar flow of 2013.

Vigo was still relatively new to the honey business, having made a dramatic change from his prior career as a securities professional when we reported on him in June, 2012. He admits it’s been frustrating. Since 2006, beekeepers throughout California and beyond have reported unexplained losses of hives. Despite many local hive impediments, “customers are very excited,” said the ranch foreman. “They love the process.”

Publishers of the Lamorinda Weekly, Andy and Wendy Scheck had a hive setback over the winter. It was like Christmas morning when the hive was delivered last June, the homeowners ready for the new arrivals, with a wood bee box in a protected location that receives morning sun.

The colony seemed to be thriving, but inexplicably, Andy Scheck said, “We were queen-less for a while and lost a good chunk of our bees.” Thankfully

Vigo had a spare colony, a new queen and drones that successfully merged; this was confirmed by a recent check-up visit by the Bee Rancher, who verified the colony was back on track.

If all goes well, the Schecks should have a bountiful honey harvest in June and again in September.

Although the family enjoys home-grown honey, Scheck said his real goal is to keep the bee population up. Colony collapse disorder is a serious concern and having an ample bee population is critical to pollinate fruit and nut trees – especially almonds.

Visiting on an unusually warm day in mid-February, Vigo exclaimed the Schecks’ hive looks fantastic with “evidence of a very prolific queen” – a positive sign, since a queen honey bee can lay up to 1,500 eggs per day. He predicts the population is really going to grow dramatically in the next month or so.

One mite was found on visual inspection of the Schecks’ hive, but there’s always more, cautioned Vigo. Varroa destructor is an external parasitic mite, causing varroaosis by attaching to bees and sucking their blood.

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Bee Rancher Mike Vigo holding a frame