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Honey harvest demonstration attracted anyone who might 'bee' curious

By Vera Kochan



A completed full frame of capped honey Photo Vera Kochan

vibrate their bodies to create heat to warm up the hive, and when it's hot outside, they flap their wings like fans to create a breeze); Honey bees never sleep; Honey bees are the only insect that produces food for human consumption; and Honey bees pollinate approximately 80% of all vegetables, fruit and seed crops in the United States.

MDBA President Jan Pinkerton Spieth brought wooden frames (approximately 1-foot by 2-feet) containing hives loaded with worker bees milling around, busily laboring to create honey under the watchful eye of their queen. "It can take a week or two to fill a frame," she explained.

According to Spieth, the wax that forms the hexagonal receptacles/pockets containing the honey is produced inside a bee's body and the receptacles are also used to contain the growing larvae from eggs laid by the queen (whose life span is typically 2-3 years). It takes 21 days for a worker bee to hatch and maintain a lifespan of 5-6 weeks.

Lamorinda Bees were represented by Rosalind Bassett, her son Rhys Pullen (a San Diego State University student), daughter Sloan Pullen (a Campolindo High School student) and husband Mark Pullen. Rhys and Sloan were introduced to the world of beekeeping while in the 4H Lamorinda chapter when they were 11 and 9 years old, and the family became hooked. Today they maintain three hives at home and two in The Bluffs and estimate that they are responsible for approximately 95,000 bees.

Bassett explained that a smoker is used when a beekeeper wants to calm the bees before opening the hive. "It can mimic a real fire causing the bees to gorge on the existing honey in case the `fire' will destroy everything including their source of food." This makes it difficult for them to sting. "The smoke also masks a bee's alarm pheromone helping them to remain calm."

Sloan demonstrated the "scraping" process of harvesting honey, whereby a heated metal "scraper" is used to remove the wax off the tops of the cells (also called uncapping). Any excess wax collected by this procedure is turned into blocks and used to make beeswax candles.

The frames with the uncapped cells were handed to Rhys and placed into an "extractor" which rapidly spun the frames for about 10-15 minutes in order to release the honey from the cells through centrifugal force. The honey was collected at the bottom of the extractor and released from a spigot onto a filter before placing into jars for sale.

Bassett encourages any interested local high school students to join Lamorinda Bees by emailing her at: rbassett@mvpctoday.org. Spieth can be reached through www.diablobees.org or by calling (925) 330-7032.



A unique learning experience in the form of a honey harvest was presented to local residents by Lamorinda Bees who teamed up with Mount Diablo Beekeepers Association to give folks a bee-to-honey demonstration during the June 4 event.

Held in the Community Room of the Moraga Library, the curious of all ages came to marvel at the various stages a honey making process goes through before the final product makes its way into jars.

A honey bee trivia board explained some interesting facts: Honey bees have five eyes (two large compound eyes and three small simple eyes); Honey bee queens lay approximately 1,500 eggs a day (in peak season); A single bee makes 1/12 teaspoon of honey in its entire lifetime (a typical 12-ounce bottle of honey needs 864 bees to produce its contents); Bees flap their wings 190 times a second; A honey bee flies 15 miles per hour; Honey bees keep the inside of their hives at 93 degrees Fahrenheit (if it's cold outside, all of the bees

"Scraping" the wax caps to expose the honey Photo Vera Kochan



Placing the "scraped" frames into the extractor Photo Vera Kochan

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[back](#)

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