

EAST SACRAMENTO NEWS

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Bee Nation, Bee City, Bee Neighborhood

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East Sacramento
Canon restaurant
due to open in
July

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CKM grad wins
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Preservation
Scholarship

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East
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SOLD

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SOLD

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represented buyer



SOLD

Life on Two Rivers:

Bee Nation, Bee City, Bee Neighborhood

By ELLEN COCHRANE
ellen@valcomnews.com

For me it was on the lower lip. A honeybee crawled into my grape soda can and seemed to think that my looming teeth and lips were a threat. Poor bee, poor me. I had a fat lower lip and an odd story, but the bee gave up her life. (Honeybees die soon after they sting.) Shrugs and smiles greet me when I ask beekeepers about their first stings, but most of us non-apiarists can remember our first pique. Despite stings, most of us also know the bee is our friend.

It's been two years since Sacramento was officially declared a Honeybee Haven by a City Council resolution. What was once the arena of the infrequent hobbyist now has mainstream interest and hives are popping up all over back yards in the city. (The city allows two per lot.)

In East Sacramento we have a new store for bee education, honey and supplies. The Bee Box is run by long-time beekeeper Jeff Becker who holds a family pedigree of deep bee knowledge and experience. His grandfather

started working bees in 1919 and Jeff is a fourth generation beekeeper. The Becker family currently works 4,000 colonies from Stockton to West Sacramento, which means they have about 160,000,000 bees on the job.

On the corner of 48th and J streets, the Beckers found their East Sacramento home. They bought the building several years ago and now own and operate the Allstate business in the building, and brother Mark Becker runs the Becker Group financial planning firm.

"We wanted to bring our products directly to our customers. We've been selling honey and pollen in large amounts to middlemen for years, but we want people to experience our pure natural products," said Becker.

The Becker vision is to slowly build out the Bee Box into more square footage at the 48th Street location. "This is just an extension of what we do. We will be here for years. Starting next year we'll offer courses on beekeeping, sell bees and hives and all the necessary supplies. We're staying put in East Sacramento."



Photo by Ellen Cochran
Sacramento City Council Member Jeff Harris, of River Park, examines a honeycomb super rich with honey at Capital Public Radio.

Becker lived for years next to McKinley Park, but now lives in Clarksburg with some of his bees. He is hands on and works the honey house and runs the hive side of the business. But be prepared to see one of his hives when you enter the Bee Box. Becker set up a demonstration hive with a viewing panel in the store. You can see the masters at work building, feeding and dancing. "I placed it here for customers to see and I'll give the honey harvest away to food banks," he said.

The honeybee is the pre-eminent nectar insect. Many types of bees gather nectar and produce honey in small amounts but it's

the multigenerational European honeybee that pounds out the honey and keeps our California crops bountiful.

One person sure to visit the Bee Box will be Sacramento's best bee diplomat, city council member Jeff Harris.

Many keepers suit up like the Michelin tire man, which was what I was expecting when I met Harris out at Capital Public Radio where he tends four productive hives, but Harris told me to come in a white long-sleeved shirt and slacks. Once on site, we suited up only in the hats and veils.

His relaxed, steady movements revealed his skill and experience. "I've worked

bees for more than 40 years." He stoked the smoker, pulled out and examined hive slats and inspected the health of the colonies, all the while keeping up a steady stream of bee information and lore.

"Smell the honey but also look at the beauty of the pollen. You can see the different colors from the different flowers," he said. I inspected a rack with purple, brown and amber hues. We talked bee reproduction and challenges and in one of the racks we saw a little red mite, the Varroa destructor. These parasit-

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Bee Box:

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ic arachnids glom onto bees and weaken them. They can only reproduce in a honeybee colony and it's speculated that these creatures along with environmental pollutants are the possible cause of the bee apocalypse known as colony collapse disorder that threatens our bee population and by extension our crops.

Harris is famous in the River Park neighborhood for his love of nature, beautiful garden and bees. But he didn't start out that way. "I grew up in Los Angeles, but I knew I was a country boy. After high school I wrote a letter to the Soil Association (the United Kingdom's leading food and farming charity and organic certification body). A local paper printed my letter and a dairy farmer in East Sussex, England offered me a job in the country. I spent the next year working the cows on a British farm."

While in England he watched a local beekeeper retrieve a swarm and when Harris came back to the states he learned beekeeping. "I worked hives in the fields, but working bees is a very tough job. The pay was very low and the 1976-'77 drought was very hard on the bees and there was no profit. After about four years, I moved on."

I watched Harris get stung on the thumb. "I squashed her by mistake and she re-

acted." He casually flicked off the stinger with his thumbnail and kept working. "When I started out I was once stung on both eyebrows, which caused the eyes to swell shut for 24 hours, but now my body doesn't swell at all. I almost like the feeling. And the girls only sting defensively."

Many of us have growing concerns about food and ecology. With all our backyard gardens, chickens and fruit trees, hives seem the perfect addition. The number of hives in East Sacramento is unclear but there are hundreds of backyard hives throughout the city. Some municipalities allow hive hosting. This is for people who have the space in their yard, but don't have the time or knowledge to tend the bees. Experienced beekeepers maintain the hive and share the honey with the host family. These healthy hives help support the overall bee population.

For now, you can learn about the hobby and see if it's for you. You can petition Harris to allow hive hosting in the city. And you can take classes and get your supplies from Becker. One thing both the Jeffs have contributed and shared is an educated love for the inhabitants of these hives, the honeybee.

The Bee Box, located at 4765 J St., is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday. For more information, call 475-1828 or visit www.thebeebox.com.



Photos by Chelsea Bray
(above) Shown here is a display of beeswax products sold at The Bee Box, a new bee education, honey and supply store in East Sacramento.

(left) Bee Box honey.



Don't Miss This Great Family Event

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Fab 40's
City of Sacramento Community
5k Run/Walk

Commemorative 10th Annual Finisher's Medal for all participants!

**Saturday
July 29, 2017**

Benefitting the Alzheimer's Association

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www.Fab40s5k.org

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SUN, JUNE 18 | 1:05

916 NIGHT
FRI, JUNE 30 | 7:05
& FIREWORKS

River Cats

fin fest

PINK in the PARK

FATHER'S DAY

916 NIGHT