



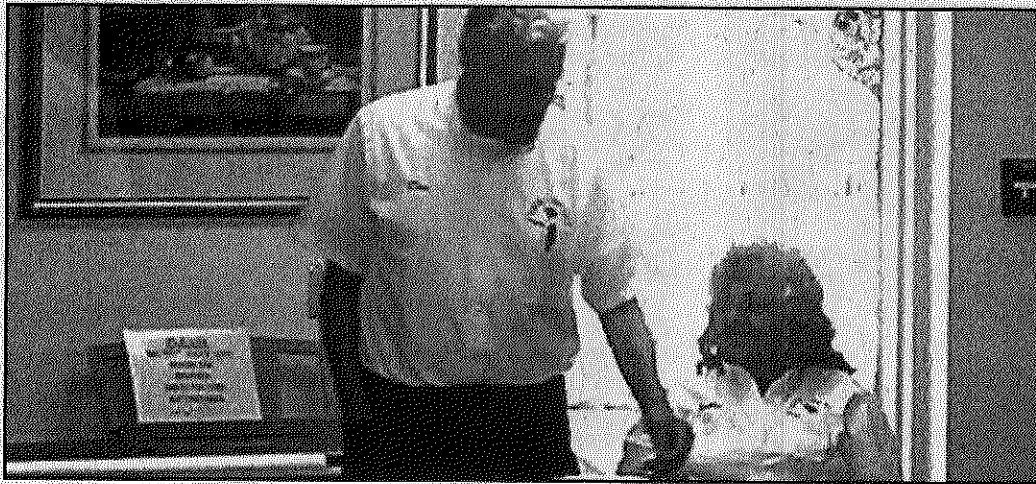
A long-time symbol of the Steinke's Bee World and Macky's Health Food is the old pick-up truck.

Photo provided

Wapakoneta area's undiscovered sweet treat

Steinke's is considered a premier honey farm in Ohio

By MEGAN VEIT
Staff Writer



Staff photo/Megan Veit

Don Steinke teaches about the importance of honey bees during a demonstration at a area nursing home.

After more than 40 years of beekeeping, Don Steinke developed deep appreciation for his bees.

His appreciation for their honey-making ability began when Steinke became a small-time producer using a hand-churned honey extractor with a capacity of three frames. Today he uses a 44-frame extractor, and the number of hives is nearly 500, with his bee yards spanning areas in Shelby and Auglaize counties.

Steinke's current 18 bee yards supply thousands of gallons of honey each year. Each gallon is run through a multiple-step process before it is brought to 110 degrees Fahrenheit and bottled.

The bottles have been shipped by the semi-trailer, leaving Ohio and sold across the United States as far west as Kansas.

"I've sent semis full of 55-gallon barrels to Michigan and Kansas," Steinke said.

The total gallons sold during 2006 exceeded 10,000, and this was after a year with too much rain for optimal honey production, Steinke said.

But honey is not the only sweet treat provided by these workers.

"It's estimated that four

It's estimated that four years after honey bees are gone, we will be, too.

— Don Steinke

years after honey bees are gone, we will be, too," Steinke said. "Honey bees are the only species that survive the winter."

While other species rely on their queen to repopulate each spring, honey

bees emerge from a dormant winter hungry and ready to pollinate crops that include up to 80 percent of those found in grocery stores.

Bees also provide the wax used

to produce ear candles, lip balm and soaps found in the store at Steinke's Bee World.

After the wax is extracted from the honey combs, which Steinke described as the most difficult part of the process, he ships the blocked wax to Celina.

From here, it is used in the production of various goods that are shipped globally via the internet.

A bad winter with temperatures too high for normal dormancy leaves Steinke with a quarter of the bee population he was expecting.

"It'll take two to three years to recover," Steinke said.

This massive loss and rebound have been cyclic every five years and The Ohio State University is researching the causes of wide spread bee loss including battles with parasites and viruses.

A recent visit from Francis Strickland to the Steinke farm provides promise for the future funding of bee research and security of the honey bee population.

While enjoying retirement, the Steinke bee farmers stay busy at the Farmer's Market, held in downtown Wapakoneta each Saturday. He also stays busy by giving presentations at area preschools, fairs and

antique shows.

Presentations feature a look at Steinke's 1918 Model-T, equipped with barrels of honey, as well as an observation hive. Onlookers get a first-hand chance to search for the one queen.

Steinke said that "she is marked by her slender body and colored dot on her abdomen." This dot serves as an international symbol of the year in which she was born.

Steinke also provides customers with free tours during August and the opportunity to purchase raw honey during September. This honey has not yet been heated and is in its purest, sweetest form.

On the opposite end of the honey spectrum is the dark honey, which Steinke Bee World sells to companies for baking purposes.

Products of Steinke Bee World can be purchased at local area shops including The Apple House, Mackey's Health Food and Kah Meats.

Don Steinke's 18 bee yards supply thousands of gallons of honey each year.

Honey bees pollinate up to 80 percent of produce found in local grocery stores.



Staff photo/Megan Veit

Don Steinke, a Wapakoneta area honey bee producer stores honey in a variety of bottles and jugs for sale. His honey can be purchased at a number of local area shops.



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