

The sweetest day in September: *The Lithopolis Honeyfest*

By JAMIE RHEIN

It could be said that the sweetest day in Lithopolis is the first Saturday after Labor Day. That's when the Honeyfest turns the Wagnalls Memorial building and grounds into a multi-sensory feast of all things honey. Its purpose is to educate people about what makes bees, their by-products and Lithopolis special.

Twenty minutes southeast of Columbus, Lithopolis is a town where elegance and charm meet. From its tree-lined streets to its centuries-old homes, the town and festival's personalities align. The venue is perfect for highlighting the science and art of beekeeping (apiculture to those in the know) and importantly, why people should help keep bees buzzing. The rolling hills, farmland and woods of the surrounding area help make the point. The landscape depends on bees.

“More than a third of our diet [depends on] pollination by honeybees,” explains Carmen Conrad, a beekeeper and one of the festival's organizers. Considering that more than 100 types of trees and plants in the U.S. rely on bees, it's clear why a day for beekeepers to share their knowledge is important.

At the Honeyfest, education involves a host of participants — from beekeeping associations, to honey vendors, to artists, to the American Honey Princess and a man who wears a live bee beard. If it is bee-related, you'll find it.

At the Ohio State Beekeeping Association station, various honeys can be tasted. Along with Ohio's varieties, there's sourwood honey from Georgia and honey from Alaska, North Carolina and even Greece. Franklin County Bee Inspector Brad McClinsy also will demonstrate what he looks for when he examines hives and why his job is important to the health of bee populations.

For bee observation, the Central Ohio Beekeeping Association showcases a large hive, providing a close-up look at bees in action. The hive's specially

marked queen reflects what beekeepers do to follow her. Along with spotting the queen, kids can try on a pint-sized beekeeping outfit.

For visual inspiration, the East Central Ohio Beekeepers Association photo contest pairs beauty with facts. The exhibit, a display of contest photographs with a bee focus, is accompanied by text explaining what each photo illustrates about bees.

The Honey Cook-Off contest offers taste bud action. Each entry has honey as a main sweetener. The entries, ranging from cookies to breads, prove

that honey is a fine sugar substitute. There's also plenty of honey-inspired food for sale.

“Most food vendors have honey-related offerings like honey barbeque and cole slaw,” says Ginger Brenning, one of the Honeyfest's visionaries. For a creamy treat, try Weldon's honey ice cream.

To teach how honey goes from hive to bottle, the Scioto Valley Beekeepers Association gives

honey extraction demonstrations. People can join in the process that illustrates the history of honey through various time periods. At the end of each extraction, honey is bottled and sold.

Honey vendors educate visitors on aspects of honey production and bee by-products. Wandering among their booths of lotions, soaps, candles and honey offers lessons in variety and beekeepers' passions.

No one shows passion and enthusiasm quite like Arnold Crabtree. Crabtree, “The Bee Man,” is a Lithopolis resident, a beekeeper and the person who first thought of the festival. A bee lover since childhood, he's the Honeyfest's most unusual attraction. Twice during the day, Crabtree steps into a screen room, and through a process that involves smoke and coaxing, grows a live bee beard. Each demonstration draws a crowd. If there's anything that shows bees aren't to be feared if handled correctly,



Everything from honey vendors to the American Honey Princess to a man wearing a live bee beard can be found at the Honeyfest in Lithopolis.

Honeyfest

(–continued from page 36)

this is it. In between shows, Crabtree talks about beekeeping the old-fashioned way.

It's through the conversations and demonstrations that the festival organizers hope some people are enticed to try beekeeping themselves. So far there are about 3,500 beekeepers in Ohio; the state could use more.

Whether or not a person attends with beekeeping in mind, the Honeyfest's bounties make it worth the drive. The aura of a welcoming garden party is evident before one first steps onto the festival's front lawn. Booths filled with invitation-only arts and crafts beckon, as does the top-notch music that wafts over the meandering crowd. For kids, the Busy Beehive area offers engaging activities.

Whatever you do at the Honeyfest, thoughts of bees, honey and their sweet goodness will follow you home. Ohio's beekeepers are counting on it. □

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The Honeyfest will be held Sept. 12 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Free. The Bee Man, 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. Free. For more information, call 614-837-2031 or visit the Web site www.lithopolishoneyfest.com.

