

Texas Bee Club Stresses Education and Youth Involvement



by MARY AND BILL WEAVER

Would you like to grow your bee club by leaps and bounds and bring in whole new families in one fell swoop? The largest bee club in Texas, CCHBA (Collin County Hobby Beekeepers Association), devised a plan in 2003, which they have been refining ever since, that has done just that for their club.

Today, CCHBA has an attendance at monthly meetings of 175-200, with enough young people attending with their parents and siblings to catch the attention of visitors. The club meets in a rented auditorium with plenty of space in a local community college, and has the services of the college's AV crew.

They rent an additional smaller room when needed to give a 3-meeting course in "Beekeeping 101" to visitors, repeated every quarter. "Visitors can easily fall through the cracks when they can't understand the unfamiliar language of beekeeping," Talbert observed. "These three sessions help them to understand some of that language, and keep them coming

back. We charge \$5 a person per session to cover the cost of the extra room, and we have enough visitors that we haven't lost money yet."

The program that has made the biggest difference in the club's growth from a relatively small group to a large one full of infectious enthusiasm for bees and beekeeping has been their "Youth Scholarship Program," started in 2003 by several visionary older members, including John Talbert with whom I spoke.

The Scholarship program has also brought into the club many of the family members who have become part of the CCHBA Club Queen program, which has launched a stunning number of Honey

Queens and Princesses, both on a national, state, and local level. Having come through the Scholarship Program, these Queens and Princesses have been very knowledgeable about bees and beekeeping.

Scholarship students receive everything they need to get started in beekeeping, plus John Talbert's 20-hour beekeeping course, which meets one Saturday a month for five months. Talbert has taught the class since its inception, recently joined by co-instructor Kaylynn Mansker, the 2011 Texas Honey Queen, who found that as Honey Queen, the part she enjoyed most was teaching about bees. Together, they have contributed greatly to the noticeable enthusiasm of the graduates.



(l) Kaylynn Mansker, co-instructor with John Talbert, with Youth Scholarship Student Tim Boerst. (r) John Talbert and Hope Pettibon, who is currently Collin County Honey Queen. Queen candidates take the course a second time to be sure they are very well informed for their new role.



Leslee Talbet, John's daughter, was the 1992 Texas Honey Queen and the 1991 Collin County Queen.



John Talbert

Talbert is a remarkable man. With a keen mind, a ready sense of humor, the wisdom accumulated from a lifetime of careful observation and constant learning, and abundant energy even at 77, he is one of the sparkplugs that keep the club moving ahead. He is also a gifted teacher, and he and Kaylynn have devised classes that make a lasting impression on their students and also help them to overcome any fears they may have about working with bees.

"I love sharing what I enjoy, which is beekeeping," he stated. "I call myself an evangelist for bees and beekeeping and honey. The more I share, the more gets shared with me. Beekeepers are some of the most wonderful people in the world. I've learned that when you give something, you almost always get more back.

"My wife always said that I turn down lots of opportunities to be quiet," he quipped. But CCHBA is clearly the richer for it. Older members refer to Talbert as "The Father of Beekeeping," and the younger kids refer to him as the "Grandfather of Beekeeping," but by either name, he accomplishes a lot.

"John is certainly a great beekeeper, with extensive knowledge," commented club vice-president Bill Zimmer. "However what really makes him great and unique and loved and respected is that he genuinely loves people. He loves to interact with them. He loves to learn about their passions and interest and jobs and hobbies, and anything else he can learn. That trait transcends beekeeping, and just makes John a great human being."

Talbert also forms strong bonds with his students. He considers Blake Shook, for example, one of the early scholarship students who now runs a 3,000 hive commercial operation with 3 employees, 2 of whom are his brothers, to have been "like our Grandson. He and his wife made us part of their wedding party as 'adopted grandparents.'" Talbert is rooting for their new baby girl, who was purposely given the same middle name, Rose, as Talbert's wife, for National Honey Queen for 2032. (Talbert's two-year-old granddaughter Sarah Grace,



Students and parents waiting for John Talbert, second from right, to open a hive in his bee yard. Most have never glimpsed the inside of a honey bee hive before.



(l) Virginia Allen, 2014 Youth Scholarship Student, ties her veil while chatting with Kaylynn Mansker, co-instructor with John Talbert. (r) Mary-Ann and Dave Allen, parents of Virginia, suited up and ready to go. They both took John Talbert's course along with her.





**Tabitha Mansker,
2015 Texas Honey Queen**

daughter of his son Skip who recently became John's beekeeping partner, is already slated in his mind as the 2031 winner!) John's beloved wife Lavada passed away in February of 2014, after "supporting me in my beekeeping activities and walking with me every step of the way through 55 years of marriage." His close relationships with club members and people at church were at that time of great comfort to him. "The need to get back to teaching the beekeeping class was a big help to me too. It gave me a focus."

This, then, is the co-teacher, with 2011 Texas Honey Queen Kaylynn, who invests 20 hours in teaching the scholarship students as a separate group from January through May of their scholarship year.

It's important to understand, though, that Talbert and the rest of the club do not consider the club scholarships to be a freebie, give-away program. There are requirements that must be met before the scholarship student's hive and gear (all new - another Talbert maxim) are his or her own. The requirements are fun ones that help the scholarship students to feel like an integral, contributing part of the group, develop public speaking skills, and give practice in talking with others outside the club about bees. Then too, they must demonstrate that they understand how to care for the hive they received during that first year.

The club requires that the student be accompanied by a parent at each of the Saturday classes, preferably the same parent each time. "The parent can help reinforce the lessons taught, and this also protects us," commented Talbert. "The parent can hear exactly what we are telling the students. In addition, the students will soon be going off to college. It is the parents who often end up with the equipment and bees. The parents stay a part of beekeeping and help



Tabitha (left) and Kaylynn Mansker, two beekeeping sisters who both won the title of Texas Honey Queen.

to grow the club. They become very passionate about it."

The scholarship program year begins at the Club's annual Christmas Banquet, a festive, well-organized pot-luck with everyone contributing food. There, Kaylynn Mansker, who is chair of the Club Scholarship Committee, announces the names of the next year's scholarship winners, introduces them one by one to the whole club, and hands out their yellow t-shirts with "Worker Bee" printed on the back.

"Worker Bees"

Part of the integration of the new students and their families into the club is that the "worker bees" help out at meetings. From helping Club Librarian Melody Seida lug her 100-plus books, lots of DVD's, educational materials and a folding bookcase

into the rented meeting place each month, to serving refreshments provided by members and the club Honey Queen and Princess, cleaning up afterwards, and helping the club president and his wife Russell and Lisa Dittfurth with any setting up needed, the "worker bees" are an important source of physical energy for club jobs that could be trying for older members after a full day at work.

Worker bees also give two presentations to the whole club during the year, the first a short overview of their beekeeping, and the second a longer speech on a beekeeping topic of their choice. Another fun requirement is manning the TBA'S honey booth for a half day at the State Fair of Texas, the largest in the country, which runs for an incredible 21 days. John Talbert, who has been in charge of the booth and of finding volunteers since 1992, needs a minimum of four beekeepers per day, two per shift, [there are frequently more], to answer



Two Youth Scholarship Students getting ready to light a new smoker for the first time at John Talbert's class.



THE test – a part of the final exam. Each student must pick up 5 worker bees, without wearing gloves, and put them into a queen cage. There is a trick to this which makes it not so difficult, which Talbert explained.



John Talbert with his late wife Lavada at the award-winning Honey Booth at the State Fair in 2007. "She was a great supporter of my activities".

fairgoers' questions about bees, show the club's beautiful observation hive, and tell people about the programs CCHBA or bee clubs in their area offer. "I believe it has real value. There is no better opportunity to touch the general consumer.

"We try to make it fun," Talbert explained. "Everyone in the member's car gets into the fair free. They ride to the booth on golf carts. They're only 'on duty' at the stand for half the day. Then they can spend the other half of the day enjoying the fair."

For a while the Texas Department of Agriculture gave prizes for booths. "We won 6 times. We were swamping them. (They stopped giving the awards!)"

The club also offers opportunities for whole-family fun, from a club picnic in May to a 35th Anniversary Celebration in June this year, as well as a honey competition that can have as many as 60 entries.

But let's turn now to the effects CCHBA's Student Scholarship Program and Club Queen Program (both of which require dedicated input from many other club mem-

bers to be financed and run successfully), have had on the lives of some of the scholarship recipients and their families.

Ambassador for Beekeeping- at Age 15!

Christian Dieterich, 15, is an enthusiastic beekeeper as a result of CCHBA's 2014 Youth Scholarship Program. Last fall, he, his Dad Mark, who attended the scholarship classes with him, and his younger brother Erik went into the winter with 5 hives. All 5 survived. Now, in July 2015, they have 9. Catching swarms upped their numbers.

Despite the heavy rains that plagued much of Texas this spring and early summer, Christian and his family extracted 114 pounds of spring honey in May, mostly from fruit blooms. "The supers were completely full," said Christian. His bees built up early with pollen patties and sugar water to stimulate the queens to begin laying. "We went to Costco and bought huge bags of sugar. Then we measured the sugar into the gallon jars we would use for feeding the bees, added hot water, and shook." As a re-

sult of these efforts, their hive populations were built up and ready to take full advantage of the fruit bloom.

Christian plans to enter the CCHBA honey competition, as well as honey competitions held by other north Texas clubs. His honey is delicious, with a hint of peach.

His Dad Mark expects that when they extract again at the end of the honey flow, they should get another 70 -80 pounds of honey, from mesquite and wildflowers.

Christian is an accomplished public speaker, and talks about bees to so many groups that he is known as an ambassador for beekeeping. He received some of his speaking venues when 2013 Texas Honey Queen Shelby Kilpatrick started college, and could no longer keep up with the informal requests for her presentations. He has taken up the responsibility with enthusiasm. "I gave talks to a Trophy Club 'Back to Nature Event,' where I had a booth about honey and bees, to Denton County Master Gardener events, grammar school students, 4-H, and cub scouts," he began. Brother Erik also gives talks about bees.

This summer for the first time the Texas Beekeepers Association featured "Kids teaching Kids" sessions, and Christian was one of two presenters representing CCHBA, speaking on month-by-month bee management.

The Dieterich family invested in a 9-frame electric radial extractor. "The boys do an extractor service," explained Mark, which is much appreciated by the smaller beekeepers in their area. "They charge \$20 an hour and will donate some of the money to the club Scholarship Program. Christian and Erik clean up the garage beforehand, set up the uncapping table with tub and knives, personally run the extractor to make sure it's doesn't get damaged, and clean up afterwards."

Christian's favorite part of John Talbert's course was actually being in the bee yard and going into a hive for the first time. His Dad thought the most interesting part was a section of the final exam, where each student had to pick up 5 bees without using gloves and put them in the queen cage.



(l) Christian Dieterich gets his "Worker Bee" t-shirt (explained in article) at CCHBA 2013 Christmas Banquet. (r) John Talbert watches as Christian uncaps his first frame of his 2014 honey crop in July 2014.

Some of the students were nervous, but Talbert had explained the trick to accomplishing this quite easily.

"When you smoke the bees," explained Christian, "they suck up honey. Their tail is down and their wings are up. You grab the wings between two fingers, keep a finger on the abdomen, and insert the bee head first into the queen cage." Christian successfully caught and caged 10 bees!

Father and son plan to start grafting their own queens soon.

Mentoring by Yahoo

The family did not have a CCHBA mentor for the scholarship year, since they live at some distance from most other club members. So with club permission, Mark set up the first CCHBA Yahoo group, to which most of the club members and families now belong. The Yahoo group appears to serve a real need. "You can ask questions about your hive and your bees and get answers from a lot of people, share ideas, or offer to pick up beekeeping equipment for other members when you're near Dadant."

This new Yahoo group is one of the many fringe benefits of CCHBA's requirement that a parent accompany each Youth Scholarship Student to John Talbert's classes. Another is that now Dad and BOTH sons are hooked on bees.

Atop a 30-Foot Ladder

Jonathan Murphy just turned 13 in time to qualify as a 2014 scholarship recipient. After going into the winter of 2014 with 3 hives, all of which survived, he and his Dad, David, now have 10 hives, some caught as swarms, and two made by splitting their two strongest overwintered hives.

Jonathan and David have gotten into some "interesting" situations with their beekeeping, like climbing a ladder 30 feet up to remove a hive under the eaves on the outside of a friend's house. "We made a pulley with a rope to get the borrowed bee vac up the ladder," explained Jonathan. "We got all the combs removed, but we didn't get the queen alive, so we combined the bees with another hive."

Another bee removal job, on the outside of a wall of a friend's business, was neatly handled by using the rubber band method to hold the removed combs in frames. "We left the box there, and soon the bees had taken over the box." Not bad for their second season of beekeeping!

Father and son also built a Long Bar hive together. "It's like a regular top bar hive, but built to hold 33 Langstroth deep frames," David explained. "It's waist high, on its own stand, which makes it easy to work, but last month when we wanted to combine a weak hive with it, we couldn't because there was no way to add a box on top. It has 3 separate entrances. We could separate it into 3 nucs, or use one end as a nursery for raising queens."

Although their home is a 30 mile drive from CCHBA, the Murphy's involvement with bees has drawn 5 other families into



Christian, right, answers questions about bees and beekeeping at the Denton County Master Gardeners Fall Festival, October 2014.

the club and beekeeping, including a neighbor who is a physician, who has outfitted his small daughters with child-sized bee suits. (David is pastor of a local church, so word of their beekeeping spread quickly.)

"Jonathan goes with me to check their hives when these new beekeepers have questions. We have a whole year's experience!" David chuckled. "But sometimes we can help. Jonathan has a good knowledge of bees, and they like to ask him questions." Jonathan has also given presentations about bees to other groups.

Jonathan and David recently took sister, Hannah, age 6, to the bee yard, rigged up with an old shirt, veil, and gloves. "She thought it was very interesting," said Jonathan, who himself showed no fear when

confronted with large numbers of real bees for the first time in John Talbert's bee yard.

The family is planning to form a mentoring/networking group for their area, with the help of the expertise John Talbert gained during his work with the national engineering organization before he retired. "We'll still be part of CCHBA too," added David.

"I recommend that every new beekeeper go through an intensive class like John Talbert gives, if possible. To me as a Dad, to do this with my 13-year-old son was very special."

The Best Things That Ever Happened To Me

Allison Adams, who reigned as National Honey Princess in 2011, after serv-



Jonathan Murphy uncapping his first honey crop in John Talbert's Honey House with an electric uncapping knife during his 2014 scholarship year.



Jonathan in bee suit

ing as both Texas and Collin County Honey Queens, states, "Two of the best things that ever happened to me have been beekeeping and this club (CCHBA). I've been a beekeeper ever since I received a club beekeeping scholarship ten years ago."

Currently, despite her very busy schedule giving private art lessons, Allison "gives back" by volunteering as the club co-chair of the local queen program. "My Mother Caryl and my sister Caroline (2013 National Honey Queen) help.

"This afternoon," she continued, when I caught up with her last January, "I just gave media training to the new honey queen and princess of our club. We start their training right at the beginning of the year, and we cover as much as we can about what their year could involve."

Allison does not, however, try to force the new queen and princess into a mold of her own making. That simply is not the way things are done at CCHBA. Instead, "At the first meeting, we talk about their own personal and professional goals and find out how they personally would like to change during the coming year. Then we talk about the number of media interviews they'd like to do, and cover public speaking and time management.

"Caroline and I will process the notes we took from each of the girls and look for ways we can help them, as the new club queen and princess, meet their own goals." This is a stunningly sensible approach!

"At the next meetings, we'll help them to develop 3 key messages they can pull out in any interview- sound bites on the uses of honey, the value of bees as pollinators, and the value of beekeeping. Then they can go on to develop other key messages of their own on other topics.

"We teach them how to develop a message and get it across, how to do a Power Point, how to handle media interviews, and how to talk to student groups. We also discuss proper attire."

The club queen and princess also have re-

sponsibilities that involve "giving back" to the club in exchange for the highly effective training that has been turning out so many state and national honey queens and princesses. "At club meetings, they bring snacks made with honey. They write articles for the newsletter. They also practice giving short bee talks at club meetings, projecting their voices so they fill the auditorium."

A large number of CCHBA's queens and princesses at the local, state (Texas) and national level came through the scholarship program. "I think it helps so much for them to have a strong beekeeping background," continued Allison. "The club wants them to be knowledgeable about beekeeping. The club was very small for a long time. Since we started the scholarship program, the club has grown exponentially with members of all ages. Often whole families come to meetings together."

Allison credits her success in her current job as a private art teacher, where most of her students are referred by word of mouth, to the scholarship program, which led to "all those years of teaching people about honey and beekeeping."

2008 National Queen Chairs Texas Queen Program

Rachael Seida, who won the coveted American Honey Queen title in 2008, after serving as Texas Honey Queen in 2007 and Collin County Honey Queen in 2006, would never have thought about beekeeping if she hadn't heard about CCHB's scholarship program.

"Sometimes I jump fast without thinking," she recalls. "A neighbor mentioned a scholarship, and I don't know if I ever even heard the 'beekeeping' part in that first conversation. I received the scholarship in 2003, along with my younger sister Michelle. [Policy has since been changed so that only one child in a family can be a recipient.] A parent must accompany the student to each of John Talbert's classes, so my Mom went with us. Barbara Corbin, one of the original club members, was my mentor during my scholarship year. When I took John's classes for a second time as part of my training for the Queen Program, my Dad went with me. Now he mostly handles our apiary. Since 2003, the whole family has been drawn into CCHBA.

"In the Queen Program, Shirley Acevedo helped me with training in communication and speaking. When I applied for the State Honey Queen program, Shirley was with me every step of the way. She chaired the Queen Program for 10 years, on both the county and state level."

Her experiences as Honey Queen have helped Rachael in unexpected ways. "When I was applying for a job, it was amazing how interesting my resume suddenly became when people saw that I was a Honey Queen!"

Rachael now "gives back" by serving as Chair of the Texas Honey Queen Program. "I train the Texas Honey Queens and coordinate events for them. There are a lot of varied



**Rachael Seida,
2008 American Honey Queen**

responsibilities. It's rewarding work. I want to give those girls the same opportunities, or better if possible, as I had. It does come back full circle, just like John Talbert says."

Rachael has started giving one-day beekeeping seminars for beekeepers who can't be squeezed into John Talbert's four, separate Saturday classes each month, which always fill up quickly. "We can't, in one day, go into the depth that John Talbert does, but these classes seem to fill a need."

Rachael, her Father, and her younger sister Anna were among the first graduates of the brand new Texas Master Beekeeper Certification program.

I Love This!

"Our 14-year-old daughter Virginia was one of the club's scholarship students last year," began Mary-Ann Allen, who has also joined CCHBA with her husband Dave. "We thought beekeeping was something we could do together as a family.

"At first Virginia was hesitant. She went through the classes with Kaylynn Mansker and John Talbert. It was a great learning experience. This was uncharted territory for her! But each step of the way, she met the challenges."

Although only one parent is required to attend the classes with a scholarship student to help to reinforce the lessons taught, both Mary-Ann and Dave decided to take the classes with her. "Kaylynn and John really did cover everything in those 5 sessions," Mary-Ann stated with some amazement.

"At the outdoor sessions at John Talbert's bee yard, we were overwhelmed with the volume of bees and the noise of the bees in the air. Just to see John and Kaylynn gently open the boxes and pull out frames, speaking very calmly as they worked, was very reassuring.

The Allen's enthusiastically started with 14 hives. (They do not recommend this for a

beginner.) "We lost one hive early on, probably from an overpopulation of hive beetles. Oil traps are a mess in our TX temperature and humidity. I began researching about using a certain type of nematodes to control hive beetles. When the larvae fall to the ground through the screened bottom boards and embed in the dirt, the nematodes supposedly eat the larvae so they never mature.

"I asked a presenter about this idea at a club meeting. His reply was, 'Could you work on this? We all learn together.' That is the typical approach at CCHBA.

"I've been very thankful to the club. Our daughter is excited, and thinks she might like to be a queen or princess. The short public speaking assignments required of scholarship students have helped to build her confidence.

"We were asked to volunteer to represent the Texas Beekeepers Association at the State Fair. We wondered, do we know enough? Another club member was with us at the beginning, greeting people, answering questions, and showing the observation hive. After a while, Virginia joined in, then

later said, "I love this!" We signed up to fill three more volunteer time-slots!"

Three Queens and a Full-Time Beekeeper From One Scholarship

"Before my older brother was awarded a scholarship in 2008, none of us knew anything about beekeeping," related Kaylynn Mansker. Soon Kaylynn's whole family was attending club meetings.

"Meetings were interesting," she recalls. "At club meetings, we just talk bees. Business, which could be boring to kids, is saved for board meetings, which anyone is welcome to attend. The club brings in really good speakers, and there is always a refreshment time and a chance for visiting with other club members."

Kaylynn herself became a sufficiently skilled beekeeper to be hired for split-making by Texas commercial beekeepers Janet and Jim Rowe. She and her younger sisters also helped commercial beekeepers Blake Shook and John Talbert with extracting.

Her brother Matthew is now the foreman for Blake Shook's large Texas beekeeping

operation, and hopes to become a commercial beekeeper himself one day. Since Kaylynn went through the club's queen program to become Collin County and then Texas Honey Queen, her younger sister Tabitha has also won these same two honors and opportunities. Youngest sister Hannah Mansker is just starting out as CCHBA Honey Princess. "The part I enjoyed most about the Queen Program was the school talks, teaching the kids about bees," Kaylynn added. Now she "gives back" by helping to teach the Youth Scholarship Program, and helping out on the state level when needed.

So grows CCHBA, along with the number of beekeepers in Texas, and very possibly, with the Murphy family's involvement, the number of bee clubs in Texas.

Next month, Part II – The supporting cast behind these Youth Programs, who work hard to give the club structure and raise needed funds, and are also enthusiastic beekeepers themselves- how these members have helped the club, and how it has changed their lives in unexpected ways.



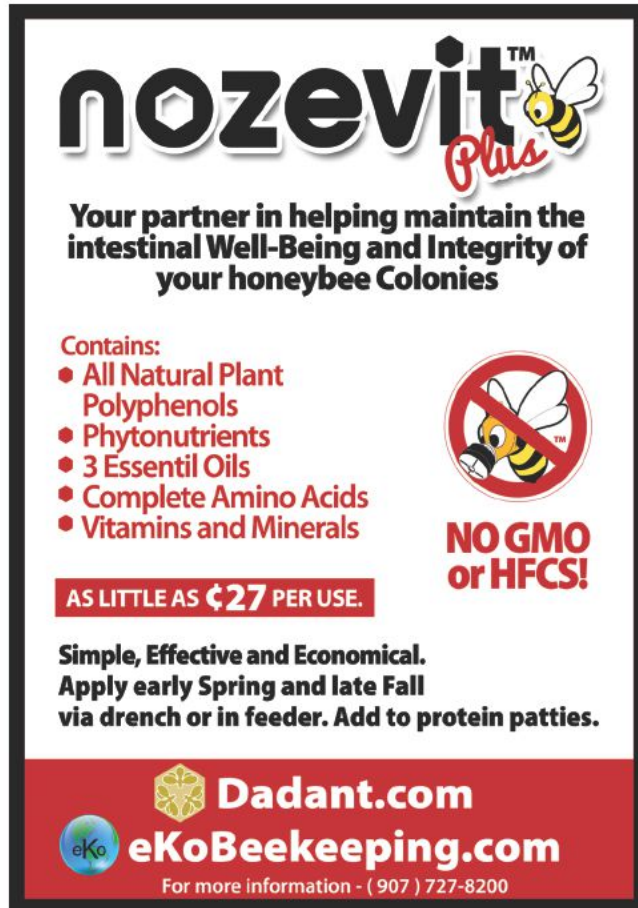
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