

# The Traveling Beekeeper

## Selling it! - Part II



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*Last month I started a photo essay about ideas and impressions I have made while visiting some very diverse beekeepers and beekeeper groups and seeing how they sell the products and services they offer. The viewpoints were probably pretty traditional—nothing shocking. Not that I plan to shock anybody this month, but maybe have a little bit more fun by sharing some IDEAS that affect many of us.*

**Y**ou don't ordinarily think about lawn grass growing in much of New York City (okay, maybe that famous tree in Brooklyn) but in July I



Organic Lawn NYC

had a chance to visit a friend (between a day-long program at Betterbee and the week-long EAS short course and conference). David lives close to the Roosevelt Island tramway in NYC. We spent the morning getting coffee and a bagel, taking the tram to the Island, touring the Island on the local bus, and talking to the tourist information folks. For starters, it will cost you a whopping \$2 each way (or use your Metro Card) to take the Tram over the East River, and then 25 cents each way to ride the island bus. The tram looks down on the 59th Street Bridge (Queensboro Bridge) featured in Spiderman movies because of its spider web-like design. If you visit the city, this is one great low budget idea I can offer—on par with a picnic lunch in Central Park. For you NYC locals, I noted



Clover in NYC

that they offer some free concerts and plays during the summer that are worth checking out as well.

Roosevelt Island has a dark past—on site is a prison with a pretty horrible past—a place where house servants who stole a few coins from their employer were sent away for life. David and I passed on the tour of the prison, but walked around a bit and found lawns and grass with the sign Organic Treated—for the grass. But there was more than grass in the area, since the Dutch white clover was still in bloom in late July. Do you think you can produce Organic Honey in Manhattan?

More and more beekeepers are looking at ways to minimize the chemical use in their operation, or are attempting to find materials that occur in nature they can use in their operation, that—while they may be pretty nasty to work with—occur in nature and are found in the beehive (usually in very low doses). So, it seems like a pretty logical step to move to the floral part of this, and to get more and more organic or native chemical treatments on the forage bees visit.

What struck me about the organic sign was that it appeared in a local neighborhood where folks really valued their community lawn. It was a place where I could visualize the locals protesting all those nasty, dangerous, allergy-causing chemi-





**Darrel Rufer and Dave Alliban**

calls being applied to control weeds and bugs and Do We Really Need This On Our Wonderful Island? It reflects what a neighborhood can do, and while people who live on Islands may be a bit more aware than mainlanders, they can still teach us a lesson or two.

Earlier in July I took a road trip with the editor of a beekeeping publication—not this one—to the 100th Anniversary Meeting of the Minnesota Beekeepers Association. Commercial beekeeper (and former food chef) Darrel Rufer was in charge of the program. He is shown here talking with Dave Alliban. Now, as a rule, commercial beekeepers all mean well, but sometimes details end up being arranged at the last minute. At the end of the day, it turned out great—I came, I spoke, I had a great time. There were a lot of beekeepers there from all over the country, representing hundreds of thousands of bee colonies.

At the meeting Dr. Marla Spivak presented an excellent history of the researchers who have worked in that state, and I hope she gets it published. Spivak is best known, I suspect, as the primary developer of the Minnesota Hygienic stock. For the two or three of you who do not know anything about this stock, in 1993 Spivak and Entomologist Gary Reuter started selecting for cell-cleaning abilities within stock at the University bee yard. Since their predecessor, Dr., Basil Furgala, was a great fan of the Starline Hybrid Bee, and had published extensively on the testing he did of this stock, Spivak said that the Minnesota Hygienic stock was unique. It was unique because it was based on a top quality, productive stock using a variety of characteristics, and was not selected for a single trait as other lines have been in our effort to find resistance to varroa mites and other parasites and diseases.

Their testing procedure involves the use of liquid nitrogen to kill brood from the colony being tested, and then counting the number of killed brood cells that had been uncapped and the contents removed in 24 hours. Spivak and Reuter found that this system predicts how well the stock will do removing diseased cells and even mites. Spivak and Reuter keep ten lines that show 95% dead bee removal in 24 hrs. This, combined with the general overall quality of the stock in honey production, brood rearing, etc., has made the Minnesota



**The photo above is Marla teaching queen rearing at the University of Nebraska in June 2005, working in cooperation with University of Nebraska bee specialist Dr. Marion Ellis and his students. Spivak and Reuter routinely conduct queen-rearing classes at the University of Minnesota each summer, and have duplicated the program in Nebraska. They have also produced a handbook and video program for queen rearing, also available from the University of Minnesota Extension website <http://shop.extension.umn.edu>**



**The Minnesota Beekeepers Association pulled vendors to the meeting, with Steve and Sandy Forest from Brushy Mountain traveling from North Carolina, and Earl King from the Walter T. Kelley Co. of Kentucky. For the vendors part of the attraction was the large attendance, but we happen to know that some vendors, spent extra time in the area to enjoy the local lakes and relax a bit.**

Hygienic stock very popular with many beekeepers.

Of some importance for bee breeders and breeder-want-a-bee's out there: Spivak says for the hygienic mechanism to work the bees from the queen must be mated to more than 50 percent hygienic drones. With our growing knowledge about multiple mating in DCAs and flyways, it is important that a program designed to produce hygienic colonies have hygienic drones abundant enough to get the 50% hygienic level.



**Mann Lake tent**

Spivak does a lot more than keep these lines going. She has an active research program using some pretty impressive graduate students. Elaine Evans and Ian Burns worked with Spivak to publish a new book on *Befriending Bumble Bees—A practical guide to raising local bumble bees* (University of Minnesota, Extension publication). Another student was responsible for preliminary research on the antiviral properties of propolis. The research team has received a big grant to evaluate how propolis works as an antiviral agent on a wide range of viruses, including against the AIDS virus. This is exciting stuff, and lot of people are watching carefully.

The afternoon of the last full day of the program was a huge open house by the Mann Lake folks. Jack and Betty Thomas, as well as their staff, were all polished and ready to show off the sprawling facilities in nearby Hackensack. The Thomas' wanted to talk with all the beekeepers who have been their customers over the years, and put up a huge tent, filled it with tables, chairs and decorations, and put on a large feed. I understand about 430 people were fed in a well-organized operation. Jack Thomas, who claims to be nearly all retired now, was clearly enjoying the meeting.

Mann Lake's high energy Stuart was the primary tour guide for visitors, greeting each group outside one of the new facilities. He took everyone through the building. Areas were cleaned, debris (if there ever was any) was removed, and caution tape was put up to prevent close inspection of any of the machinery—for safety reasons, of course. There were employees stationed throughout the building.

Below we see the paint room, or part of it. Stacks of hive bodies and supers are painted and allowed to air dry in the build-



**Mann Lake paint room**





The giant tent offered plenty of space for folks to mingle and talk. Here Brenda Tharp Bray, of Mann Lake advertising, and Jack Thomas, owner of Mann Lake Bee Supplies, speak with Steve and Sandy Forest of Brushy Mountain Bee Supply of North Carolina.

ing. More than one person said it was cost effective to get everything assembled—I'd have to figure that out for myself.

There were lots of beekeepers in the banquet area. In the photo below the Honls and the Morlocks are able to visit and swap bee stories.

All the folks have something to sell. The Minnesota beekeepers were selling their 100th Anniversary, and did a great job of it. Dr. Spivak and crew did a fine public relations job for both the University and the research program. The Thomas' were able to give back to their customer base and educate some new visitors, such as myself. The vendors had a motivated crowd, and from the Dadants to Wicwas Press, we had a good visit. Finally, the speakers were able to sell the ideas they came to promote, and that seems to be what brings us all together for these meetings.

So, from the banks of the East River in New York City to the 100th Anniversary meeting of the Minnesota beekeepers, July was a pretty active month of driving and visiting.



There were lots of beekeepers in the banquet area. Here the Honls and the Morlocks are able to visit and swap bee stories.



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