

# The Traveling Beekeeper



## Reaching Out--Two Members of the Collin County (Texas) Hobby Beekeepers Association

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*Emphasis on youth mentoring and community outreach pays off  
for the Collin County Hobby Beekeeper's Association (CCHBA).*

One of the facts that stand out when you visit with the Collin County (Texas) Hobby Beekeeper's Association north of Dallas is the youthfulness of its membership. Most of us are likely to look out over a sea of grey (or my case, shiny) heads when we look at the membership of the usual bee club. But the Collin County group does something that makes the club unique and youthful: They offer scholarships to interested 12-17 year olds who want to learn about bees. The club awards a bee hive, bees and equipment. The youth managing the bees reports back at monthly meetings, and keeps up interest by participating in the club's educational programs and by working with a mentor. Parents are invited to get actively involved. This means that the scholarship winner often brings his or her entire family to the monthly meetings, and they all get involved in club events. It is no surprise that younger siblings become future scholarship winners.

The objectives of the youth program are very clear: "to educate youth in the art of beekeeping...to provide ...youth experience, responsibility and enjoyment through beekeeping, and provide avenues for youth to engage in an avocation and gain the potential to pursue beekeeping as a sideline or fulltime vocation."

Each youth that is awarded the scholarship receives a one year membership in the Collin County Hobby Beekeeper's Association (CCHBA), a beginning beekeeper seminar registration and textbook, a set of woodenware for a beehive, a nucleus or package of bees for the hive, various beekeeping gear:

hat, veil, gloves, hive tool, and bee smoker, and mentoring by a CCHBA member for one year. I suspect the mentoring is a key to the success of this program.

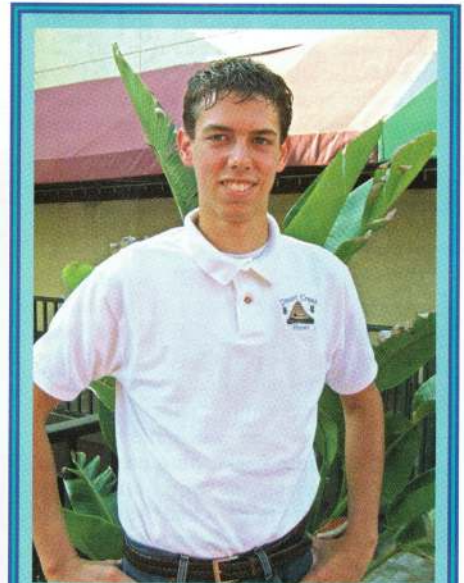
The program is remarkably successful. Last January 19 scholarships were presented to the huge field of students interested in keeping bees. And one of the best parts of this program is that the young beekeepers become part of the working team of beekeepers who put on the bee meetings, arrange for speakers, and teach the new beekeeper's courses. The young women are encouraged to become involved in the honey queen program, and they have had considerable success as they moved up in the Texas Beekeepers Association and National Honey Queen programs.

It has been my pleasure to address the Collin County club a number of times, usually when my travel brings me through the area for other meetings. Last fall I was asked to speak by Blake Shook, the vice-president of the club. What is remarkable to me is that Blake has been keeping bees since he was 13, and he now operates 150 colonies. Blake was 17 when he invited me to speak. He'll be 18 by the time you read this, and is graduating from high school this spring as well. If I read this right, he will replace current president A.P. Warne in a matter of time. Warne is not old either, but is in his early 30s and supports all these Texas bee clubs with his time and generosity.

Blake and I were able to sit down and discuss some of his activities when we were both at the Texas Beekeepers Association meeting in Galveston last fall. Blake owns the Desert Creek Honey

Company of Blue Ridge, Texas. In addition to being the CCHBA vice president, he is also director of the Youth Program. He raises and sells queens, builds bee equipment and markets honey.

While confident that he wants to grow his beekeeping operation, he has not decided on which course his future will take. He has his own bee truck, but uses another beekeeper's honey house to extract and bottle his honey. At one level he wants to



**Blake Shook, vice president of  
the Collin County, Texas  
Beekeepers Club**





Janet Rowe and pets



Janet with nuc

keep bees, but there are a lot of folks advising him to go on to college and study biology or business management or some other field that will support his beekeeping interests. We talked about his potentially working for different commercial beekeepers in Texas and around the country. We talked about the importance of learning how to keep bees in the different regions of Texas, as well as learn whatever he can about beekeeping in different parts of the country.

Blake worked closely with John Talbert of Josephine, Texas and owner of the Sabine Creek Honey Farm. Talbert, a mechanical engineer, retired from Raytheon, is past president of both the Collin County and the Texas Beekeepers Associations. He now serves as the TBA State Fair Booth Chairman, and on the board of directors of the American Beekeepers Federation. The honey house at Sabine Creek Honey Farm is also the classroom where classes are offered for the youth scholarship winners and all the adults who enroll as well. It is also the honey house Blake uses.

Another adult influence on Blake Shook has been Ted Vance, who operates Vance's Honey Company in McKinney, Texas. Also past president of the Collin County group, he is currently president of the Texas Beekeepers Association. Operating 500 colonies, he also manages colonies for over-wintering beekeepers from other areas. His bees are moved to almonds in the late winter and to cotton in west Texas in the summer. Some of Blake's bees have been included with Vance's operations.

With two beekeeping "fathers", Blake is approaching a point where he feels the need to do more beekeeping on his own. Yet he appreciates the work, energy and the investment Talbert and Vance have placed in him, and he does not want to cause any hard feelings.

Blake is also supported by his close family structure. He father and at least one brother usually attend the beekeeping meetings. His mother has home schooled him, as well as his brothers, and this has

let him grow in his beekeeping. "Many of the scholarship students are home-schooled," Blake explained. This may be a significant aspect of the success of this program, one other groups should keep in mind as they attempt youth programs like the one in Collin County. I have noticed that there are many "home schooled" families at beekeeping meetings around the entire country, suggesting to me how much a child can learn by the study of bees and beekeeping.

The Collin County Hobby Beekeeper's Club meets the second Monday of the month at the Heard Natural Science Museum. For details about their meetings, rules for the youth scholarship, honey queen program, and how to reach the club's officers go to their website:

<http://www.northtexasbeekeepers.org>

### Janet Rowe

Janet Rowe is a bee charmer in many ways. A resident of Wylie, TX, Janet serves the Collin County club as a delegate and member of the newsletter staff.

Janet keeps an observation hive in her home, off the kitchen, and is ready to show

visitors the workings of the hive. She also packs off the observation hive and beekeeping equipment and travels to local schools, and has visited hundreds of fourth graders with her observation hive, bee suit and story telling. She charms children, and their teachers, when she explains how bees live inside the hive, and how important they are in the grand scheme of food production and world ecology. Her knowledge of plants comes, at least in part, from her involvement as a Rockwall County Master Gardener. Who best to tell folks about the role of bees in pollination than someone who is passionate about both the bee and the flower?

Janet and I have met at beekeepers meetings and I was pleased that A.P. Warne made arrangements to take a day off from work and drop me off at Janet's home for a visit. Later that day Janet drove us to the Collin County Hobby group where I was scheduled to speak. Both of us had just been at the annual Texas Beekeepers Association meeting in Galveston. Janet showed me around her home and gardens. It was early November and the bees were still flying, but the forage was limited to



Bees at entrance of one of Janet's hives





**Bees under cedar tree to shield them**

some composites along the roadsides and in random gardens. Mostly, the bees were at the entrances of their hives and interested in protecting their season's hard labor.

Her bee equipment is that of a hobby beekeeper, and a busy one. She spends a great deal of her time doing outreach to non-beekeepers, as well as her time as on the local newsletter. Reaching out to others is an important part of her life.

Janet explained that her neighbors know she has bees on the property, but she did not want them to know how many are located on her somewhat rural site. "I spend a great deal of time hiding beehives," she admitted, and showed me how large plantings of ornamental grasses, cedar trees, and buildings were used to shield bee hives from the eyes of the casual visitor. In fact, there were not too many colonies on the site, but a nice mix of beehives and large garden plantings. I was impressed how large grass plantings served as both a visual screen, as well as a windbreak for the bees during the Texas

winter. Those thick grass clumps are very effective at deflecting bees away from an area of human activity.

As bee charmer, Janet also collects bees, and has earned her Texas Structural Pest Control license and has a business removing bee swarms and other stinging insects. It means she has to be prepared with ladders, a full bee suit and other tools to climb to reach the bees (or other stinging insects) and remove them. She often receives help from her husband in this regard. She uses a variety of tools, including vacuum cleaners, to remove the insects.

Since the region of Texas where Janet lives has Africanized bees, Janet uses a full bee suit when working bees, even her own. She is reluctant to take the chance that the next colony she inspects has been taken over by an invading African swarm.

Finally, Janet produces a number of hive products, such as jars of honey that are sold at a local sales outlet, including a Bee Charmer hand cream that also includes propolis, in addition to beeswax and oils. She says that few hand products include propolis in this country.

As a bee club, the Collin County Hobby Bee Association has many talented individuals who are more than willing to support their club and make the programs work well. I know that there must be many hours spent by the officers and directors planning the future educational efforts, as well as finding ways to finance the scholarships and queen programs. What makes this group unique is that it incorporates these talents into a team effort, and the group is more interested in the success of the program, rather than one individual looking good at the expense of other members. There are other clubs in the country that operate in ways similar to this one, but the youth programs and non-beekeeper outreach make the Collin County group worth study and a visit by other beekeeper organizations. Any of the people I have mentioned in this article are likely candidates for an invitation to speak at other groups about the educational programs of Collin County Hobby Beekeepers. Collin



**Hive by fence**

County does a very credible job at education, and their program is worthy of careful examination and even imitation by other clubs.

Readers are able to reach Dr. Connor at [LJConnor@aol.com](mailto:LJConnor@aol.com). Also visit the Wicwas Press website, [Wicwas.com](http://Wicwas.com), which recently added a bookstore feature that uses PayPal for payment. Check out Dr. Connor's two books, *Bee Sex Essentials* and *Increase Essentials*.

**Hawaiian Queen**

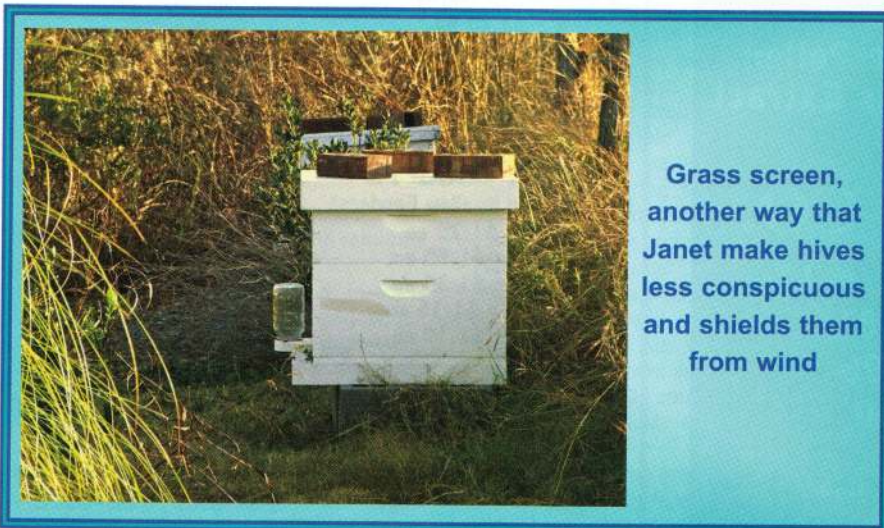
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