

Bees: Unpredictability, finicky nature draw beekeepers in

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Right now, they say, the tiny black and yellow insects are struggling. Colony collapse disorder, a mysterious phenomenon where worker bees abandon their hive and their queen, has decimated bee populations across the country in recent years. According to some estimates, the total U.S. honey bee population is less than half of what it was at the beginning of the 1950s. In the early 2000s, commercial beekeepers found more and more of their hives completely abandoned.

Collecting swarms

But, in Pacific County, the outlook for bees this year is bright. Another service the club provides, both to club members and the general public, is swarm removal. When a honey bee hive’s population swells and it becomes too crowded inside, the colony will split and a number

of bees, along with a queen, will search for a home elsewhere. This is called swarming and it can look a little horrifying: The bees mass together, forming often huge, swaying clumps that hang from tree branches. Then club member Dutch Holland might get a call and out he comes with a box and unceremoniously dumps the bees inside. If the queen goes in first, sometimes the workers will fall in line and follow her scent into their new home. This year alone, Holland has collected 18 swarms. Another member collected 23, most originating from his own assortment of hives. All together so far, the club has gathered approximately 70 swarms and will likely end the year with close to 100, Holland predicts. Of these, he says, about 80 percent will become successful hives with larvae-bearing queens and a healthy worker bee population. “That’s impressive for one little club,” he said in a phone in-



NATALIE ST. JOHN — EO Media Group

Beekeepers have many tools of the trade, one of the more important is the smoker, which helps keep bees relatively calm while beekeepers work on a hive — though some beekeepers don’t use them at all.

terview June 25. “This is going to be a good year. We had an early spring and it’s probably going to be a late summer so bees are going to be active all the way through.” He says it feels like the bees are coming back.

Unpredictable, finicky

Meanwhile, back at the farm, the inspection of hive No. 3 has become a more

complicated operation. Paul Young lifts one box. Instead of a neat patchwork of honey and pollen in the cells there is a drooping mass of comb built by the bees themselves along the bottom of the frame. Bees are everywhere, the “bzzzzzz” rising loud and mad once again. Young calls for another box and a bucket. He and other club

members carefully scrape away the excess. The excitement dies down. Young moves through the boxes. He has not found a queen, though there are several “queen cups,” indicating that the bees are trying to pave the way for a new queen. A hive without a queen is a hive that won’t last long. The queen is the only bee that lays eggs; she is the engine at the heart of any hive. Looking at the hive from the outside, it would be impossible to tell that its inhabitants are facing such a perilous future. From the outside, it looks busy — literally buzzing with bees, collecting and storing honey. Steve Young and Fischer have options, though. The most obvious option is to bring in a new queen themselves, a purchase they could make online or through some local beekeepers and bee breeders. The important thing is they found out before the hive really started to suffer, they say. This unpredictability and the bees’ own sometimes finicky na-

ture are what attract people to beekeeping. Inside any hive, there’s a whole other world unfolding. Old queens die and newly hatched queens stalk the combs, killing rivals. Drones — the male bees that mate with the queen — hang around for as long as they’re useful, then they’re shown the door. Workers and nurse bees attend to honey collection and the rearing of young. Together, the bees rise to face attack and flee together when the hive is lost. And beekeepers are the delighted spectators and concerned stewards of all of this. Or, as Friedlander says, “Managing bees is like herding cats. They’re going to do what they’re going to do, but you can kind of guide them in the right direction.” For swarm rescue, call Dutch Holland at 360-942-7830. For more information about the beekeeping club, visit its Facebook page: Willapa River Beekeeping Club.

Riverwalk: Thousands owed

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The city of Astoria’s Finance Director Susan Brooks said as of early June, Smithart owed the city \$92,000 in lodging taxes and past-due water bills. And Knight said Smithart owed \$16,000 to the county, as of the beginning of June. Smithart’s lease on the Riverwalk Inn runs through September 2017, with an option to extend another five years. As part of the lease assignment, the Port would enter negotiations on a new lease with Sonpatki, who said he wants at least 17 years. Knight said he has reached the end of his patience with Smithart, who he said has been difficult to get in touch with. Smithart has also not responded to several requests for an interview over the past week. Knight has said his best guess was that Smithart might be negotiating for a better deal, adding that he could add an investor with up to 49 percent ownership without Port Commission approval.

Playing the field

Former Astoria commercial developer Chester Trabucco, who invested millions into the Hotel Elliott before selling the property in 2010, came forward as an interested party in the Riverwalk Inn. Trabucco said he represented a partnership interested in the

hotel, although he never revealed any partners. Perplexed by a Friday story in The Daily Astorian reporting the lease on the Riverwalk Inn still might still be available, Sonpatki called the newspaper Monday. He said Smithart had signed a contract long ago stipulating he turn the hotel’s operation over to Param by September, with bonuses for leaving early. Before Sonpatki’s call Tuesday, Knight said Trabucco had called to say his partnership was no longer interested. “It appears it has already been sold,” Trabucco told the newspaper Tuesday.

... and video games

Smithart and partner Seth Davis’ Hospitality Masters, which had not operated any hotels before, won the blessing of the Port Commission in March 2012 to reopen the shuttered Red Lion Inn overlooking the West End Mooring Basin. They beat out Portland real estate and development company Williams/Dame & Associates, which has designed hotels, apartments, subdivisions and office buildings around Portland, Bend and Los Angeles. The company wanted to tear the former Red Lion down and build a new 84-room hotel surrounded by a boardwalk. The Port’s original lease with Hospitality Masters was for \$10,000 a month, plus 10

percent of the hotel’s gross revenue. By August 2013 the Port had already given Smithart his first eviction notice, after he fell behind as much as \$40,000 in rent and revenue-sharing with the Port and \$48,000 in the city’s lodging taxes. Smithart figured out a payment plan and survived. The Port Commission voted 3-2 in November 2013 to give Smithart a \$5,000 monthly reduction in rent November through April, provided he re-invested it in the hotel. Knight said it feels as if Smithart is using the Port’s — and by extension the public’s — asset in the hotel to build an arcade. While falling behind on bills at the hotel, Smithart opened the Arc Arcade a year ago at the corner of 11th and Commercial streets. He started with mostly retro arcade consoles he said came from his own collection and friends, along with a cafe and video game rentals. He has since added computer rentals, flat-screen monitors, a gigantic flat-screen television with gaming console rentals and a large selection of comic books. Last month, Smithart opened an expansion of the Arc Arcade, with an entire additional room of retro arcade games, billiards and Skee-Ball. He has also talked about starting laser tag, game design classes and a public-access television station.

Panhandlers: Must have permit

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The definition of an itinerant merchant in the code applies to “a person occupying a temporary fixed location, who promotes, solicits or sells from stock or inventory on hand or displays samples and solicits orders for merchandise in stock.” The amendment seeks to expand the definition to include any person offering a service, entertainment or nothing, in return for compensation. Currently the ordinance entirely bans begging or soliciting on the streets or in any public place, the amendment to the itinerant merchant regulation would allow that activity — as long as the individual has obtained a permit. The fees remain unchanged: \$50 per day or a maximum of \$1,000 in a calendar year. Many municipalities’ laws restricting or disallowing panhandling or begging have come under scrutiny as being unconstitutional in the past few years. “It’s one of the things that has changed,” Winstanley said, adding it has put police officers in a difficult position when it comes to enforcement. With the amendment, he said, “We’re telling them that that would be OK, but you just have to follow the rules.” The amendment also would change the definition of temporary fixed location to “any business location, public or private.” The amendment also prohibits services from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m., when all merchandise

and ancillary equipment must be enclosed within a permanent commercial structure or removed from the temporary fixed location. “We also wanted to make sure there was an understanding that itinerant merchants could only work during what’s basically the daytime hours,” Winstanley said. Councilor Tita Montero said she liked the change because sometimes entertainment can cause a disturbance during nighttime hours. The penalty for violating the ordinance is \$500, but the amendment seeks to increase the penalty to \$700. Finally, the amendment adds a new exception: “The city reserves the right to limit licensing in heavily congested areas during periods of

extreme crowding to protect the safety and security of both merchants and customers.” There are certain times during the year — such as Fourth of July or during the Hood to Coast Relays — that are not appropriate for people to be selling or soliciting as itinerant merchants because of congestion and other safety concerns, Winstanley said. “There’s just too much activity in the downtown core area, which is where we see the majority of itinerant merchants,” he added. The ordinance does not apply to garage sales or farmers markets, which are licensed under a different ordinance. The ordinance is slated for possible adoption at the council’s meeting Monday.

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