

ARTS & CULTURE

‘Urban Honey’ made locally

By **SOPHIA EDELBLUTE**
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Editor's note: This the first in a series of Sentinel articles exploring local beekeeping.

Francis Rothauge, 82, steps through tall, dry grass towards ten white boxes of various heights. He himself is wearing white, a white bee suit that is, as a few of the boxes' inhabitants buzz up to investigate him. His head is covered in mesh but it's not hard to peer through it and see the wide grin across his face.

Those boxes are ten hives of honeybees; his honeybees. Though it's only a portion of the 40 or so he tends.

One of the first times Rothauge thought about beekeeping, he said to himself, "There's no way in heck I could ever do that. That guy's got a lot of guts to work with bees."

"And here I am," he said.

He lends his bees to farms around the Cottage Grove area, and a bit farther, though all the hives are spread within 35 miles of his home in Cottage Grove. The farmers' payment for the pollinators? Usually some of the produce they help create.

"That's what I'm doing in up at Marcola. [The woman there] pays me in blueberries. One of the blueberry

guys that is down by Elkton wants me to bring bees down there next year. He wants me to bring 20 hives to put down at his house for a time if my price is right. So, there is a need for pollination on things," said Rothauge.

For 12 years Rothauge had been tending bees and saving unwanted wild hives from extermination. His first experience with bees, or at least a full hive of them, was when he retrieved a swarm from his fir tree at his previous home in Salem.

"The bees landed in the fir tree and I climbed up in the tree and cut the limbs out, and we didn't have a [bee] jacket or anything. Anyway, I cut the limbs out and [my] seven-year-old stepdaughter [was standing there], held them down to her and said 'take this Heidi. Easy, just take this over and set it in that bucket.' And she took them and put them in the bucket. Neither of us got stung at all," Rothauge said.

He then put some cheesecloth on the bucket and left them for a bit while he found a box to put them in.

"I found somebody that had bee boxes and I went to take them out of the bucket," he said. "Well by this time the bucket was almost home and also they

had chewed through the cheesecloth and they were coming and going."

He kept that box for about a year and then passed it on to his dad.

Now Rothauge and his wife Frannie sell what they call "Urban Honey." Rather than a specific flower's pollen, the bees use the pollen of a variety of urban plants. Rothauge says that in order to label a honey as "blackberry honey" or "clover honey," that plant must take up at least 50 percent of the bees' pollen. Because Rothauge has hives all over, and a lot of his bees get pollen from gardens in Cottage Grove, the name Urban Honey just fits.

As for creating and processing the honey itself, it's no easy feat, for Rothauge or the bees.

From spring to winter the bees are busy with different tasks. In the late spring and early summer, they swarm, which is essentially a hive split.

Half of the hive follows the old queen to find new living quarters while the other half stays with the newly hatched queen. At this point, Rothauge could potentially double his hive count but only if he can catch the swarms, which isn't as easy as it seems.

They have to be coaxed into a box by leaving out old comb with honey in it.



SOPHIA EDELBLUTE/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Francis Rothauge dons a bee suit as he pulls a frame from one of his hives. The frames may look light, but can weigh more than five pounds.

If they are tempted to stay they'll remember where that box is and move in. But the downside is the old queen. Depending on her age she may not be a very good queen.

In the summer they get down to business stocking up honey which would normally keep them fed through the winter. That's where Rothauge comes in. Because he harvests the honey, or "robs" it, as he says, the bees will need food through the winter. In order to keep them healthy he feeds them peppermints, substitute pollen and sugar syrup.

"My wife always complains because we get bags and bags of peppermints and she's gotta unwrap them all so that when I go and feed the bees I can take a handful and put them on the top," Rothauge jokes, "You put twenty of these [peppermints] on top of the beehives and in three days they're gone."

Rothauge only robs the bees once a year, he says. But when he does, he gets

hundreds of pounds of honey. In fact, this year he predicts he'll have to process over 1,000 pounds of the stuff and get it into jars to sell.

The process is long and includes freezing the frames of comb to kill any wax moth larva, cut the caps off to release the honey, use a fancy, expensive, machine called an ex-

see **HONEY** on A7

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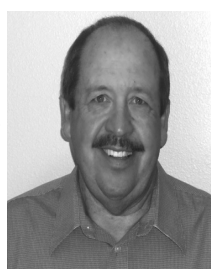
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