

New KP Beekeepers Group Joins State Association

KRISA BRUEMMER, KP NEWS

The Key Peninsula Beekeepers, a new local group started by Key Peninsula resident and Journeyman Beekeeper Dave Leger, has joined the Washington State Beekeepers Association, classifying them as a nonprofit organization.

Since the group's formation in June 2018, membership has risen to more than 50 beekeepers, with an average of 20 attendees at monthly meetings. "It kind of snowballed on me," said Leger, who had not anticipated such a high level of interest. "I was just trying to meet everybody that lives close to my house and have a meeting here at the library, and then there was this huge demand for beekeeping education."

During their March meeting, beekeepers expressed concerns about recent losses. Scott Sherman, who worked with his dad to raise 50 hives in the early 1980s and has been beekeeping on his own for five years, had only one out of four hives survive the winter.

"I think it was really hard because of how warm it was in January," Leger said. "The bees get active too early and they eat up a lot of their food reserves. And then when we had that bad cold spell with all that snow, they had to kind of shut back down again."

Leger is enthusiastic about working with the Washington State Beekeepers Association, which will provide a level of consistency for education and training. "There's a big loss of bees for people that actually know how to keep bees. If you're losing half or 70 percent of your bees and you know what you're doing, it's really hard for the person that's just going in and buying a package and sticking it in the box," Leger explained. "Eventually we'll have a network of people, all learning the same material from WASBA, all teaching the same material, and everyone on the same page."

Through WASBA, the Key Peninsula Beekeepers will have the opportunity to work their way through certifications for Beginning Beekeepers, Apprentice, Journeyman and Master Beekeepers.

As more KP beekeepers achieve certification and move up through the beekeeping ranks, they will pay it forward by mentoring less experienced beekeepers.

"The ideal thing is for those people who graduate the class to keep bees for a year and then start teaching and mentoring," Leger said.

Leger's fruit trees have tripled in their production during his four seasons of beekeeping. He attributes much of his success to meticulous mite control. "You talk to anyone that's had bees for a long

time, it used to be that you could just stick the bees in the box and go collect the honey and you didn't have to worry about mites. But it's not like that anymore."

The KP Beekeepers group is interested in pollination as well as honey, with members who keep both honeybees and mason bees. Mason bees do not make honey, but they are efficient pollinators and popular among fruit tree owners. Dianne Everson, who teaches a class on mason bees at Sunnycrest Nursery, presented the group with mason bee basics at their March meeting.

"A mason bee is built like a hair brush," Everson said. "It's like a big hair suit on this bee. So, the mason bee, if it lands somewhere that has pollen, and then lands on another plant, there's a 95 percent possibility of that pollen going down and hitting the ovaries."



Dave Leger confidently inspects this honeybee hive frame without donning the iconic beekeeper's suit. Photo: Chris Konieczny, KP News

While honeybees are more sedate and "can end up falling in love with one apple tree," Everson said, "mason bees are erratically flying all over your property. They'll run into your head. They'll try and go up your nose."

In addition to being easy to keep, another benefit of mason bees is that they don't have the same mite that attacks honeybees.

On Saturday, May 11 at noon, Leger will present at the Key Peninsula Library's "All About Honey Bees!" event. Following Leger's talk, there will be honeybee crafts and a presentation for children.

The Key Peninsula Beekeepers meets on the fourth Thursday of the month at 6 p.m. at the Key Center fire station. For more information, go to keypeninsulabeekeepers.com.

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