

OCBA Meeting Minutes, May 10, 2018

Cynthia Speed

Our pre-meeting dinner was held in the Fireplace Room at Radius Pizzeria in Hillsborough with 9 in attendance.

President Mark Powers opened the meeting following the brief social period from 7:00 to 7:15 as members enjoyed refreshments and talked about their bees. Members who needed to rush off before the meeting ended, had an opportunity to talk with each other and refreshments were available throughout the meeting. Refreshments were provided by Nerissa Rivera and Kenneth Lee.

Mark introduced our speaker for the evening, Ben Dictus, lead beekeeper for Bee Downtown in the Triangle area. He is a native of Wisconsin and started keeping bees when he moved down to North Carolina in 2015. He keeps personal hives but gained the bulk of his beekeeping experience while working for Eurofins Agrosience where research involved over 1,000 hives! He will soon finish his PhD in Higher Education Administration.

Ben explained that Bee Downtown, located on the American Tobacco Campus in Durham, partners with businesses in cities to help save honeybee populations. They install and maintain beehives for the businesses they work with. They have created a turn-key environmental program that includes hands on beekeeping classes for employees, data collection from the hives to further honey bee research, and reports on hives and the impact they have had in the community. They currently service companies in Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill with an expansion planned this spring to Atlanta, Georgia. The goal is to add one new city every year.

Companies sponsor a hive by purchasing it. Hives are placed in visible spots near the business with the business logo painted on the front of the hive by local artists. Some hives are on roof tops and Ben shared pros and cons of urban rooftop beekeeping. The business keeps all of the honey produced from the hives. Currently 120 hives are managed by Bee Downtown. Most businesses support two but NC State and the NC Museum of Art have eight and Keith Arboretum has fifteen. Some of the companies that have bees are SAS, IBM, United Way, bioMerieux, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Bull Durham Beer, and Honey Girl Meadery. There are bees at Delta Airlines in Atlanta 200 meters from the airstrip, and American Underground has an observation hive.

Two hour tours are offered most Saturdays at Bee Downtown's Durham Apiary at Bull City Cool and at their Raleigh apiary at the NC Museum of Art. It was started as a non-profit but became a for-profit company with a non-profit leg. They cleared \$350,000.00 last year.

Mark introduced one of our apprentices, Catherine Trusky, who gave a fascinating personal account of a species of stingless bee native to Central America. Catherine explained that the *Melipona Beecheii* is only .08 inches in length and produces ½ gallon of honey to every 10 gallons of honey produced by European bees. It has a rounded body with head, thorax and abdomen that are not visibly segmented. All of the queens, workers, and drones develop in the same type cells and are all roughly the same size. All roles are self-determined and all females have the ability to develop as queens! As you can imagine, this makes for a lot of caste conflict and short life spans. They are eusocial with gentle dispositions and don't sting but do bite. They have a single entrance that they cap off at night to discourage predators. They chew through the cap each morning. *Melipona* has been observed primarily in tropical forests and builds its nests inside hollow cavities of trees and as a result has been seriously affected by deforestation. The increasing use of insecticides in the forest and a decreasing interest in this ancient religious Mayan practice of beekeeping has reportedly led to a 93% decrease in hives over the past twenty-five years. Their main forage is on star fruit which adds a citrusy flavor which was delicious and which we all enjoyed because Catherine thoughtfully brought some for us to sample.

Randall Austin proudly announced that the following members were now certified. Whoo Hoo!!

Anne Cabell
Haywood Rhodes
Jessica Mjelde
David Bailey
Tommy Tuck
Sheri Gant
Jill Hadden

Preordered Agritourism signs were distributed by John Rintoul.

Raffle items given away were 1 Agritourism sign, and a medium 8 frame box along with an 8 frame copper top donated by Chris Apple. Bailey Bee Supply donated a stainless steel double honey strainer as well as 2 packages of bees through a generous offer to donate 1 package of bees for every 75 packages purchased by our members.

There were 48 members and guests in attendance.