

Buzzing bee beards attract onlookers to apicultural meeting

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

LANCASTER — Steve Conlon, a homestead farmer and bee hobbyist from West Virginia, and Brad Montgomery, state apiarist from West Virginia, displayed nerves of steel and a talent for "sculpting" to become the winning team in the bee beard contest. The contest was held in conjunction with the 31st annual conference of the Eastern Apicultural Society of North America, Inc. going on at Franklin and Marshall College this week.

The West Virginia duo beat out 11 competitors for the most evenly sculpted beard fashioned from thousands and thousands of bees. Second place team was Dot

Harvey and Don Hopkins from New Jersey, and third place team was Richard Vansandt and Max Beck of Florida.

Each group worked with a box of bees, weighing from three to five pounds, with one pound containing about 3,700 bees. The person on whose chin the bees were sculpted had a queen bee in a box tied to his chin.

Once the timing began and the bees were dumped out of their box, the second team member worked with a card, encouraging the bees onto the face and neck of the competitor.

Asked why he entered the contest, Conlon replied, "I had seen Bard do it and I was attracted to

the idea of doing something like that. There is not much danger for people who work with bees." Conlon, who was stung on the finger early in the process, said it didn't bother him. He gave all the credit for winning to Montgomery, saying, "It is the skill of the applicator."

Montgomery said he was glad to be the sculptor and not the sculptee, noting, "I knew he had the nerve." He pointed out that the secret of getting a well balanced beard is that bees like to go to the shady side of the face. So once they did, he created shade on the other side with the cardboard which is permitted to hold the bees during the sculpting process.

"I don't want to suggest people try this themselves. There is always a risk," Montgomery cautioned. However, he said there was little danger from these bees because they were well fed prior to being released. He also said that change is what causes them to sting, and noted that if there had been a change in atmospheric pressure during the contest, the bees would not have been so docile.

Montgomery also credited organizers with doing a great job. "The contest here is the best organized bee beard contest I've seen." He complimented them on having a large number of people monitoring the contestants, as well as having professionals available to remove bee stings should the need arise. They also had a vacuum to remove the bees in a hurry if someone got in trouble.

Other smaller but equally important equipment on hand included plenty of rubber bands to close off pant legs and shirt sleeves to prevent bees from stinging under the clothing, and cotton,



Do these gents need a trim? Each apiarist used thousands of bees to sculpt a beard on his chin and face.



This contestant in the "bee beard" contest stayed calm and didn't flinch a bit as he coaxed the swarm of bees up over his shoulders to his chin. To attract the bees, a queen bee in a box was tied to his chin.

which contestants stuffed in ears and nostrils prior to the contest.

After the final judging, all the bees were taken off contestants and used to literally cover up Max Bert, who offered to help the group try to gain a place in the Guinness Book of World Records by seeing how many bees they could use to cover him.

The bee beard contest was a small part of the three day conference for the beekeepers, with 670 persons registered from all over the eastern United States and

Canada. Prior to the conference a beekeeping short course was offered on the campus.

Throughout the parking lot, bumper stickers extolled the virtues of honey and beekeepers with slogans like, "I'd Rather Bee Keeping," "Bee Keepers Make Better Honeys," and "Bee My Honey." Most of those attending the conference are hobbyists, according to conference officials, but they take their hobby seriously, and enjoy learning more about their favorite sweet.



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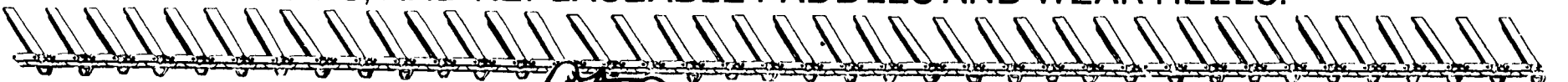
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