

Bee Keeper Claims Bees Relieve Stress, Aches, Pains

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff
CATASAUQUA (Lehigh Co.)
— Lee Schleicher of Catasauqua admits his beard gives him a "buggy, crawly feeling."

It's no wonder. His beard, which reaches almost to his waist, is formed by about 3,000 honey bees.

To grow a bee beard, Schleicher, who is 57, said that a queen bee is stuck into a small cage with a screen. Strings attached to the cage are tied around Schleicher's ears to hold the cage on his chin. Colonies of bees are released and settle on Schleicher's face so that they can be near the queen bee.

Cotton is stuffed in Schleicher's ears and nose to keep the bees from entering.

"Sometimes I need to spit a few out of my mouth," Schleicher said.

"I guess I'm either daring or crazy to do it," Schleicher said, "but at bee conventions there are usually more volunteers who want to participate than needed."

The purpose of forming a bee beard is to prove to the public that bees are not as dangerous as people believe. Consequently people won't kill a bee every time they see one.

He regrets that many bee conventions no longer sponsor the event because they can't get insurance to cover it. Still, Schleicher maintains that the feat is not dangerous.

"The secret to keep from getting stung is to remain calm and move slowly," he said.

If he gets a few stings in the process, Schleicher is not alarmed.

"It's healthy for you," he said. So healthy, Schleicher believes, that he offers therapeutic bee stings to people who suffer from rheumaty arthritis, bursitis, gout, and sore joints.

A bee's venom supposedly causes the body to produce an anti-inflammatory agent that will counteract the poison and has the pain-killing effect of cortisone.

Schleicher heard about the healing powers of bee venom in 1985 when he had a degenerate hip and needed to use a cane. Following the suggestions from a speaker he heard at a bee seminar, Schleicher held a bee at his hip and knee joints to sting him every other day.

"After a week or two, I had no more pain and no longer needed a cane," Schleicher said.

He admits that most people are skeptical of the unorthodox method of treating illnesses, but he has a loyal following from those who have tried his method and found relief.

Schleicher's most prominent patient is University of Charleston catcher Jack Goddess who opted for the bee remedy in 1989. The baseball catcher had suffered an injury diagnosed as rotator cuff impingement in his right shoulder. Frustrated with the agony of pain and of missing out on the playing season, Goddess sought medical treatment but found no relief.

His father, a railroad engineer who works with Schleicher, told his son about the bee sting theory.

"I'll try anything at this point," Goddess said.

Schleicher placed a few bees

from his bee hives in a jar. With a tweezers, he captured one and held the bee on Goddess's shoulder, which had previously been cooled with an ice cube.

"Ice takes the initial shock of a sting away even though you can still feel the penetration," he said. After a 20-minute wait to make sure that Goddess did not have an allergic reaction, Schleicher administered three more stings.

"Generally a person can take 500 to 800 stings before the venom kills a person, but all it takes is one sting if the person is allergic," he said.

Schleicher gave Goddess a jar full of bees so that he could apply the bees himself. Goddess's friends were amazed and eager to administer the stings. After cutting the daily dosage back to about three or four stings a sitting, twice a week, Goddess returned to the playing field and moved from ninth place to fifth in the batting order.

"I know it sounds outrageous," Goddess said, "but I feel 10 times better."

While many countries recognize bee stings as a viable cure to treat pain, Schleicher said that the U.S. is slower in endorsing this method. Schleicher is pleased that many M.D.'s will be attending a Boston convention, American Apitherapy Society Incorporated, this summer to learn about the method.

While the medicinal values of bee stings for humans are debated, Schleicher is more concerned with the diseases that are afflicting bees. Schleicher, who has 43



With about 3,000 forming his beard, Lee Schleicher said, "It's a buggy, crawly feeling." To keep from getting stung, Schleicher said that the main thing is to remain calm and enjoy it.

Beekeepers perform the bee beard stunt to show the public that bees are not as dangerous as many believe. "We don't want people killing a bee everytime they see one," Schleicher said.

hives, said that he lost 15 colonies this year to tracheal varroa mite. The parasite lives in the throat of a bee and weakens it until the bee dies. According to Schleicher the larva started in Europe, was brought to the southern states, and has now traveled north.

"I don't buy bees out of state because it's too dangerous," he said, "but the mite got here anyway."

With the help of the extension agent and a state bee keeper examiner, Schleicher plans to have the cones treated with menthol so that they can be reused.

"A 3-pound starter hive kit costs \$109 to \$150," Schleicher said. With 43 hives, Schleicher sometimes gets more than one ton of honey from the bees. He heats it in an 80-gallon stainless steel tank to 130 degrees and strains it with a nylon mesh. The honey is stored in

five gallon buckets and bottled when needed. Although his wife, Carolyn, doesn't help with the bees, she did take a short course in beekeeping from Delaware Valley College. Her husband took a beekeeping course from Penn State.

In 1991, Schleicher's honey won first prize at the Pennsylvania Farm Show in the extracted light honey division.

Schleicher makes beeswax candles from the cappings of the honeycomb.

"Beekeeping is a good past time. It keeps me out of trouble," Schleicher said. "When you're working with the bees, you need to concentrate on what you're doing. Bees are a good way to get rid of stress, aches, and pains."

Schleicher may be contacted at 308 Walnut St., Catasauqua, PA 18032, or call (215) 266-1772.

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