

Pennsylvania Honey Queen Jona Hoover

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HOLTWOOD (Lancaster Co.)

— You don't need to raise bees to love honey. Nor do you need to raise bees to be an articulate spokesperson for the bee industry. Not if you're Jona Hoover, who recently assumed the role of Pennsylvania Honey Queen.

When Jona began to baby sit for the state chairperson of the Pennsylvania Honey Association, Becky Fisher Gerhart, she immediately became immersed in the honey industry. Becky immediately recognized Jona as having potential for being an excellent communicator and leader — exactly the qualifications needed to become a voice for the bee industry.

Becky, herself, was the state Honey Queen in 1980-81. And, she's been actively involved in promoting the industry ever since as chairperson for the organization.

Although Jona liked honey and was intrigued with the bee industry, she wasn't sure how she could fit the role as honey queen into an already busy schedule. In addition to school, job, community, and church activities, Jona is the state's Miss Job's Daughter, who represents the youth organization for the Girls' Masonic Community.

But planning is Jona's forte. She plotted the responsibilities and found that duties as Miss Job's Daughter are heaviest in the spring while bee promotion is scattered throughout the year with the most demanding responsibility in the fall.

Becky taught Jona what she knew about the industry, and Jona searched library books to expand her knowledge further.

The next step was filling out an application and writing a 300-word essay on honey. At the Beekeepers Meeting in November, Jona was interviewed by a panel of judges, and points were tallied for poise, personality, and knowledge. Jona came out the winner and was crowned at the November meeting but it was not until February 1, that Jona officially began her duties.

Although Jona doesn't come from a beekeeping family, it won't be long until that changes. Plans are made to set up some beehives on her grandparents' (Dick and Carol Hoover's) home this spring.

"I'm looking forward to first-hand experience in beekeeping," Jona said.

She's also learning all she can on combating mites, the biggest problem facing the industry.

"Mites don't affect honey but they weaken the hives so there is no honey," Jona said of the widespread problem.

Federal law requires that all hives be treated, but the mites are difficult to eradicate. Although bees generally return to the same hive, stray bees do enter other hives. Guard bees allow the stray bees to enter if they are carrying honey. If the bee is a carrier, the disease infects the hive.

Jona needs to answer questions pertaining to the industry whenever she appears at promotions. Answering unpredictable questions doesn't intimidate Jona.

Jona said that she fits the description of oldest children — doers, take charge, outgoing, and responsible.

"One needs to be a leader when



Pennsylvania Honey Queen Jona Hoover offers samples of honey to encourage consumers to use more honey.

you're one of six children," she said. "I think that has influenced my life more than anything else.

"Our family is very close," Jona said of her parents, R. Scott and Sandy Hoover and siblings, Jarred, 17; Judah, 15; Jason, 14; Jozlyn, 11; and Josiah, 9.

Honey promotion began in the Hoover home when Jona enticed her brothers to eat oatmeal by drizzling honey over the hot cereal. That sweet touch made all the difference in taste. Jona hopes that honey promotion is as convincing outside the home as it was with her family.

The Hoover family (mother and children) sing together for churches and organizations. Her father takes care of the technical sound. Jona said, "My mother always says she raised her own backup group."

Of her drive to achieve, Jona said, "I've always had high expectations for myself."

Last year, she graduated from Penn Manor High School where she was a member of student council, the volleyball team, National Honor Society, Spanish Honor Society, International Thespian Society, and a cast member of plays and musicals throughout high school.

So that Jona could devote more time to promotional duties, she postponed college education a year. In cooperation, Millersville University agreed to hold her scholarships until she begins studies in public relations communications in the fall.

Jona works for Gourmet Pretzel

Gallery and is active in the Millersville Brethren In Christ Church. She is a member of Eastern Star and Amaranth, both Masonic-related organizations for women. She has been a member of Job's Daughters, a community service organization for girls, since she was 11 years old. She traveled to Seattle to compete for the international title of Miss Job's Daughter, where she placed third out of 31 contestants.

At the end of her reign as honey queen, Jona will again travel to the West Coast, this time to compete for the National Honey Queen title.

Jona said her favorite honey is the kind made from blueberry blossoms, but she enjoys many other varieties of honey.

While fulfilling duties at promotions across the state, Jona often spends the night at the promotional chairperson's home, Becky Fisher Gerhart.

Becky's husband said, "If we ever have a daughter, we hope she's just like Jona. "She's so reliable and responsible — just a really neat person."

The Gerharts' sons refer to Jona as "That Girl."

Now Jona good-naturedly refers to herself as "That girl who promotes honey."

In April, a brochure with Jona's favorite recipes using honey will be released. For a copy, send a self-addressed stamped business-sized envelope to Rebecca Fisher Gerhart, 66 S. Manor St., Mountville, PA 17554.



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