

## What all the buzz is about

### Honey beekeeping viewed as vital to environment in Sheboygan County

by Jeff Pederson  
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When spotting a bee, the first thought for many people is to make a quick beeline out of the area for fear of a potentially painful sting.

Town of Plymouth resident Peter Dietz's first thought when coming across a bee is quite the opposite.

Since 2016, Dietz has maintained honey bee hives at his Crystal Lake property. It is a past time that he thoroughly enjoys for a variety of personal and environmental reasons.

"I have been keeping honey bees for three years," Dietz said. "I have four hives. My hives have been quite successful, as I have never, as least not yet anyway, lost a hive.

"We do not sell our honey, or pollen or bees," he said. "My wife and I primarily keep bees for their beneficial effects on our environment, which includes our garden and our orchard, as well as the wildflowers and trees. Of course, we do process honey for our own use and we also make a few gallons of mead, which is honey wine. We get about 150 pounds of honey per year."

While Dietz does not profit financially from his honey bee hives, he has received plenty of satisfaction in caring for his bees.

"Honey bees are fascinating," Dietz said. "Each hive is different, each queen is different, each season is different. I truly enjoy watching the hives grow and change, they teach me something every time I visit the hives. Of course, we enjoy honey on our toast in the morning and an occasional taste of the mead."

In addition, Dietz is active in promoting beekeeping throughout the area as a member of the Sheboygan County Beekeepers Association.

"The Sheboygan County Beekeepers Association has about 60 members," Dietz said. "We meet once per month. We share best practices in beekeeping and provide education to schools and fairs and community organizations. We also socialize through picnics and potlucks each year.

"In addition, we review the status of our hives, provide mentoring to new beekeepers, ask

members to respond to community issues with bees, such as bees in the walls or swarms," he said. "I do not know how many beekeepers there are in the county, but there are at least two commercial apiaries in Sheboygan County - Sunset Apiaries and Honeyland Farm. Each has over 500 hives."

While beekeepers like Dietz find the joys of beekeeping to be plentiful, there is a negative perception of bees among a considerable section of the population.

"Many individuals have had a bad experience with some type of bee, such as a wasp, hornet, ground bee," Dietz said. "Such interactions can lead to the idea that all bees are aggressive. However, bumble bees and honey bees are much gentler than wasps, hornets and yellow jackets. When a honey bee is out foraging or looking for nectar or pollen, it is focused on its task and very unlikely to sting unless provoked by capturing it or stepping on it.

"Similarly, it might seem that introducing a honey bee hive, which will have over 10,000 bees, to an area might make the area more dangerous, especially if one has an allergy," he said. "Instead, the mild honeybees tend to displace many of the other aggressive bees, so the area near the hive actually becomes safer for such individuals."

Furthermore, Dietz says honey bees differ from other varieties of bees in how and when they sting.

"Honey bees can only sting once," Dietz said. "Other bees can sting multiple times. When I moved here, I noticed high density of wasps, hornets, and yellow jackets. Soda cans were visited frequently by various bees.

"My honey bees have displaced many of these bees," he said. "Since honey bees are gentler, the environment is safer. My neighbor feeding orioles grape jelly and oranges has also noticed many fewer of the other varieties of more aggressive bees."

In describing the key work that honey bees carry out on a daily basis, Dietz points to the important role that honey bees play in the health of all forms

of life on the planet, as well as the sustainability of the overall natural environment.

"Roughly, one-third to one-half of all food that a person eats is connected to the pollination that honey bees help to carry out," Dietz said. "Equally important is that the health of our wild areas, such as fields and forests, depends on the effective pollination, which honey bees do. In addition, the fruits, seeds, nuts of wild plants provides the food that the wild animal population, including deer, chipmunks and birds require.

"Without honey bees as our pollinators, the beautiful rural area that we live in would be seriously damaged," he said. "In short, pollinators are critical to our health and environment."

Dietz says the population of honey bees and similar types of pollinators has been placed in jeopardy in recent years.

"Honey bees and other pollinators are dying," Dietz said. "Around 50-70 percent of beekeeper-managed hives are lost each year nationwide. Sheboygan County beekeepers have reported 70 percent losses over the past three years.

"The losses in the wild are likely even higher as there are very few wild honey bee hives," he said.

Dietz says a varying of natural factors negatively impact the prevalence of honey bees, which further raises the important caregiving role of beekeepers.

"Honey bee hives are vulnerable to mites, disease, pesticides, insecticides, wasps, hive moths, hive beetles and a variety of other issues," Dietz said. "Across the U.S. and certainly within Sheboygan County, in recent years, approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of managed hives die each year.

"If the hives that are getting care from a beekeeper are dying at such a high rate, what do you imagine is the death rate for wild hives?," he said. "There is no way of knowing for sure, but since the wild hives are exposed to the same issues as managed hives, it would seem likely that an even higher percentage of the wild hives are dying each year."

In Sheboygan County and throughout the United States, honey bee hives can be found in many cities and urban populations.

"Many cities are allowing bees," Dietz said. "Chicago has over 5,000 hives. Honey bees are quite common in Milwaukee, Madison,

Neenah, Appleton, Fond du Lac  
and Oshkosh.

“Honey bees are safe and should not be feared,” he said. “There is a beehive at the Children’s Museum in downtown Sheboygan. There are beehives at Bookworm Gardens in Sheboygan, which has over 10,000 children visitors per year.”

For more information on the Sheboygan County Beekeepers Association, visit [sheboyganbees.org](http://sheboyganbees.org) or email [info@sheboyganbees.org](mailto:info@sheboyganbees.org).