

The Diablo Bee



January Featured Speaker

Orin Johnson is a commercial pollinator and honey producer with a couple life times of experience. He is the past president of the California State Beekeepers Association, as well as the Delta Bee Club. He will be speaking about the best way to bring your hives out of winter. An overview of Orin's rich background follows on Page 4.

January Meeting

Thursday, January
10th - 7:30 PM

The Gardens at
Heather Farm -
Camellia Room

1540 Marchbanks Dr.,
Walnut Creek, CA
94598

2013 Packaged Bees Orders – for MDBA Members

Place your order with Mary Andre at the Jan 10th or Feb 14th meetings for packaged Italian honeybees. Cash or a check is due when your order is placed.

Important things to know

- Order Early - Orders placed in March may not be able to be filled.
- **\$60 for 3 pounds of bees.** (That's about 10,000 bees.) The queen is included but is not marked.
- Pick up your order at the MDBA Spring Beekeeping Workshop, **Saturday, April 13th**. This is a great opportunity for novice beekeepers to receive hands on instruction from experienced beekeepers. More information about this workshop will follow.
- Package boxes from previous years that are in good condition, empty and clean, can be reused, bring them to the March or April MDBA meeting.

How do I get them in the hive box?

For online information about how to install packaged bees into a hive box, Google videos or YouTube "installing package bees" and you will get many sites.

Here are a couple of YouTube videos:

<http://www.nebees.com/package.php> - How to Install a Package of Honey Bees

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVaYD3e9KOA>

NOTE: There will be no candy in the queen cages, so do not remove the cork and thus release the queen until a few days after installing the package into the hive boxes. Look at the queen when you take the queen cage out of the package to check that she seems okay. Mary will have a few replacement queens.

October BBQ and Meeting - A Great Event Enjoyed By All!

Submitted by Lois Kail

The MDBA annual BBQ/social was held October 11th, 2012. It was a cool evening but the BBQ was well attended and enjoyed by everyone present. There is a lot of planning and preparation done before the event and I want to take the opportunity to say thank you to folks who helped. There is always the possibility that I have forgotten something or someone - I intend no slights but appreciate all of the effort given on behalf of the bee club.

Sylvia and Dan Goemmel are troopers in preparation: Sylvia made 'to do' lists for various board members and also for the early set up of the room at Heather Farms. She was our manager to get tables decorated, assigning jobs for folks who came early to help. She also donated all of the table decorations that members could take home at the end of the evening. Dan was the food table manager, deciding where the meat, salads and desserts would be placed, keeping the meat trays full and recruiting help in setting up more tables as needed.

Mike and Gabrielle Harrell were responsible for transporting the sound system and BBQ supplies from their storage area to the venue. Not only did they bring everything but then set up the sound system. Gabrielle had

prepared an inventory of BBQ supplies so that we didn't purchase more paper goods than was needed - using up the past supplies first. At the end of the evening, Mike and Gabrielle then repacked BBQ supplies (in labeled boxes!) and the sound system to transport back to storage. Thank you so much!

Gary Lawrence and Bill Cervenka met members and guests at the door to help direct the potluck contributions to the correct tables and instruct folks to locate their seating in the main room. I am sure that there were many other questions that they answered or directed to folks who could help. Gary also coordinated the Beekeeper of the Year voting and award, plus all of his warm and sincere words of wisdom.

Dylan and Brian Wort set up the raffle table, sold tickets and then oversaw the running of the raffle after our meal. I saw a lot of other folks helping at the raffle table as well, bringing their items to donate for the raffle and organizing the tables.

Now, no potluck proceeds very far without the kitchen staff: **Jan Spieth** headed up the kitchen detail (Valerie Schmidt was unable to attend) with a great army of helpers - none of whom I

know by name and they didn't wear their name tags (Shame on them!). Please be aware that your keeping the kitchen clean, refilling the drinks table and running with full pitchers of water was greatly appreciated and didn't go unnoticed.

Seth Tator and Stephanie Taube managed the table to collect 2013 dues from returning and new members, plus checked that the roster information was correct. The club can't run without our members and having accurate records is essential.

Board member **Mike Stephanos** could be found helping wherever help was needed. I can't begin to list all of the necessary big and little errands that he completed.

The 2012 BBQ was a delightful, fun and delicious evening. Thank you to ALL of the folks who helped in a myriad of ways. A sincere compliment is worth its weight in gold - or in this case, its sweetness in honey. Thank you again.

(Watch for a photo gallery of memorable moments.)

This newsletter is under construction. Thanks for your tolerance! D. Walker at walkers81@comcast.net

Please pay 2013 membership dues now

Annual membership dues are **\$20**---and are due now! Your membership in the Mt Diablo Bee Association is annual and renews January of each year.

Renewing members are asked to complete the MDBA membership form at time of payment. You may pay at our January 10th meeting (forms will be available at the front table--arrive early or pay at the break) or you may download the membership form on the website and mail it with a \$20 check payable to:

MDBA
PO Box 4688 (NEW POST BOX!)
Walnut Creek 94596.

After March 31st dues increase to \$25.

Classifieds

UNWANTED CAPPINGS?

Do you have unwanted cap-pings? I will melt and clean them for the beeswax. Lois Kail, lois.kail@gmail.com, (925) 356-2602

MENTORS NEEDED

If you would like to be a beekeeping mentor please contact Dan Goemmel at kq6ar@astound.net

BEE SUIT REPAIRS

Call or email Lois Kail
lois.kail@gmail.com (925) 356-2602

BEEKEEPING SUPPLIES

1960 Monument Blvd., Concord, CA 94520

MarElla Honey B's

ph: 925-575-7444

fax: 925-566-8112

marella.honey bees@gmail.com

www.marellahoneybs.com

To add to the classified section please send an e-mail to
walkers181@comcast.net

2013 Meeting Calendar

January 10

Program - **Orin Johnson**

February 14

Program - **Major Branzel**

March 14

Program - **Mann Lake (TBA)**

April 11

Program - **Randy Oliver**

April 13 - Beekeeping Workshop

May 9

June 13

July 11

August 8

September 12

October 10

No meetings November and
December

2013 MDBA BOARD

President

Brian Wort

Vice President

Sylvia Goemmel

Secretary

Lois Kail

Treasurer

Seth Tator

VP, Community Education

Mike Stephanos

VP, Membership

Jan Spieth

VP, Member Education

Gabrielle Harrel

VP, Newsletter Editor

Deborah Walker

Like father like son, Orin Johnson carries on a beekeeping tradition

This is a reprint of an article in the March 14, 2007 issue of ***AgAlert - The Weekly Newspaper for CA Agriculture***

In the early 1980s Orin Johnson held a satisfying position as a switchman for Pacific Bell Telephone Co. in Modesto. Then his father made a small request. "My dad called out of the blue one day and asked me for this favor. I said 'Sure Pop, what is it?' He said, 'Your mother and I have a chance to go on this program,'" Johnson recalls. "I didn't even know what he was talking about at the time. He said, 'I need someone to take care of the bees while I'm gone.' I said, 'No problem. Where are you going?' He said, 'The Philippine Islands.' I asked, 'How long are you going to be gone?' And he answered, 'A year.'"

Johnson's parents, Charles and Frona Johnson, who are now deceased, were active in the Mormon church at the time and were both in their 70s when their church asked them to go on a year-long mission to teach the Filipino people the apiary business. Charles Johnson, a well-known beekeeper from the rural Stanislaus County community of Empire, had worked the bees for many years, both for pollination and honey production.

"Orin's father had been in the bee business forever and he lived into his 90s," said Los Banos beekeeper Gene Brandt, past president of the California State Beekeepers Association. "But Orin, having been raised in the business, really didn't want anything to do with it. It is a lot of hard work, you sweat and you get sticky."

Charles Johnson trusted his son to care for the bees while he was away, which he did for a short time with his brother Nate.

"My father said, 'I have all of these commitments. You have to move the bees into the almond orchards and then out, and once you get them out you can put them up in the foothills and just leave them. Whatever money you make is yours,'" Johnson said. "They were leaving just prior to almond pollination."

The chore of taking care of his father's bee business blossomed into a new career for Johnson.

"Because there was a lot of rain at the time, it was a big honey-production year for sage, which is a crop you only get every four or five years. So just by taking care of the bees part-time on the weekends, I made \$5,000," Johnson said. "When Dad came home I said, 'I'm not giving the bees back to you, Dad. I'm going to buy them from you.' And actually, he was happy. The only reason he hung onto the bees for so long was because he wanted someone to continue with them. Once you quit the business, you lose your locations and that was what he held onto in case me or my brother ever wanted to take over."

Today, with more than 20 years in the bee business, Orin Johnson now operates Johnson Apiaries in Hughson. He remains committed to working with the landowners that he and his father built relationships with for over 60 years—only now he works with the younger generations as well.

"I am still using spots on ranches that we have used for over 60 years between the two of us. I deal with grandsons of the people my dad dealt with and got the original permission to use the property," Johnson said.

This past fall, Johnson was elected president of the California State Beekeepers Association, an organization of beekeepers from hobbyist to commercial that has been in existence since 1889. This honor comes exactly 50 years after his father served in that capacity.

"I wish my dad was still alive to see me as the president and the things that are going on now in the industry. I think he would just be overly pleased," Johnson said. "I remember as a little boy, Dad would take me with him to transport bees and one of the places he went was Hollister and this was before the San Luis Dam was built. Going through the San Luis Valley at 4 and 5 o'clock in the morning, I remember seeing just hundreds and hundreds of deer. It was a real treat to drive through there in the wee hours of the morning because the deer were just everywhere."

An essential component of the nation's agriculture, honeybees pollinate about \$15 billion worth of crops annually. California's almond crop alone is worth \$2 billion.

One of the big issues for today's apiarists in California is a shrinking amount of good bee pasture available to them to store their hives in the winter and throughout the remainder of the year. Beehive health is also a concern. A worry for beekeepers this year is colony collapse disorder, which leads to the abandonment of the hive. Also, pests like the Varroa mite and small hive beetle have destroyed bees and weakened hives.

"Beekeeping is not as enjoyable as it was because of all of the problems we are having with mites and keeping hives alive, but bees are such fascinating creatures and can just do amazing things in such a short period of time," Johnson said. "As soon as you think you know something about bees, you find out that you are just beginning to learn."

In addition, with almond pollination being such a high priority in California—especially as more acres of almonds come into production over the next several years—there is concern about having enough bees for pollination.

"There are not a lot of beekeepers left in California," Johnson said. "I think the average age of a beekeeper today is around 60 years old and a majority of new beekeepers are second- or third-generation beekeepers."

Johnson and his wife, Patti, who serves as secretary/treasurer of the beekeepers association, have two grown children, Neil and Robyn. Neil, who is working on his master's degree in psychology at San Diego State University, says beekeeping could be something to fall back on.

"Before college I was running my own bees. However, I want to see how far I can take my education before I decide what to do," he said. "Getting into the bee business with my dad is an option, but he is very supportive of anything I have wanted to do."

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