

# **Raising a Club**

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From **Woodworking** to **Queen Rearing** to mentoring the **next generation**:

Prairie State Beekeepers Local Queen Project

*Presentation is adopted from an article for the ISBA Newsletter written by Andy: Buzzing with DIY Queens and Equipment*

# The Woodshop

- ❖ Woodshop access provided by member
- ❖ Build days
- ❖ Economical equipment
- ❖ Specialized equipment
- ❖ Fun
- ❖ Raised funds for club

- Long-time beekeeper Bill Budd generously opened his woodshop to club members
- Members came together and built:
  - 4-frame nuc boxes (these were critical to mate the queens)
  - Swarm traps
  - Solar wax melters
  - Michael Palmer double nucs
  - vented hive covers and much more!

# The Local Queen Project

- ❖ Local queens
- ❖ Fun and educational collaboration
- ❖ Real value to members
- ❖ Raised funds for the club

- One of the things that always seemed to be in short supply were readily available queens.

The club now produces its own queen cells.

In the aforementioned wood shop, mating nucs were made to mate said queens

Cells and queens were made available to club members providing an economical and convenient source of queens for good hive management practices.

# More than a project

- ❖ Raising our next generation of beekeepers
- ❖ Having a common goal
- ❖ Being able to pass on knowledge
- ❖ New energy and young eyes to help with grafting!

- The sale of the local queens and the woodworked equipment raised thousands of dollars
- The proceeds were used to establish the Prairie State Beekeepers' Education fund.
- Our scholarship recipients have ranged between 10 and 16.
- Very rewarding to see young kids getting into beekeeping
- Mentorships and having them attend meetings has invigorated the club
- The young beekeepers have been very helpful in grafting queens (young eyes and all!). They have been quick to catch on and are now queen larvae grafters whose rate of success far surpasses that of any adult in the club to date!

# Prairie State Beekeepers' Education Fund

- ❖ Scholarship pays for
  - ❖ Equipment
  - ❖ Package & queen
  - ❖ Class through I LextSang
- ❖ Beginners attend meetings and become club members
- ❖ Beekeepers provide guidance and mentorship

- Proceeds from club activities were used to establish the Prairie State Beekeepers' Education fund.
- We've been awarding about 2 scholarships a year equipping young beekeepers and paying for their attendance at the Prairie State –sponsored Introduction to Beekeeping class offered through Sangamon County Extension Office for University of Illinois.
- Our junior beekeepers attend our meetings and are mentored by our beekeepers through all seasons of beekeeping starting from a brand new package, also paid for through the scholarship.

# How did it happen?

- Sustainable apiary management needs queens
- Established beekeepers were willing to give the new kid's idea a try
- Everyone was working together
- Everyone was learning and had fun!

- Inspired by Michael Palmer's sustainable apiary approach<sup>1</sup>, I pitched the idea of local queens to the bee mafia: Steve Petrelli, Mike Mason, Bill Budd and Rich Ramsey 4ish years ago.
- At the time, I did not realize how everything would come together, but the mafia recognized that the status quo of purchasing packages is a dead end. Lack of local queens crushes beginners. Change was necessary. When the club began this journey, I don't believe any of us realized how well it would do.
- So, here we are demonstrating that club queen rearing is a noble endeavor to be enjoyed by all.

# Sustainable Apiaries

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## 2 key pieces:

1. Someone with knowledge of queen rearing.
  - I didn't have the knowledge starting out, but have spent many hours listening to lectures while working in my basement or watching my kids.
  - I have shared this knowledge: others have this critical knowledge through shared demonstrations and the willingness to learn.
2. The second ingredient is
  - all the beekeepers who have been willing to share their knowledge and resources at times:
  - Young beekeepers were capable and willing to assist in the grafting!



# The Resources

- Supplying healthy overwintered hives
- Building equipment
- Understanding forage and feeding through learning from others' experiences
- Sharing knowledge
- Open minds
- Paying it forward!

- Queen supply
  - Dave Tebrugge runs 25-35 hives and was a critical part of the process supplying most of the queens when I had a terrible year of overwintered colonies due mostly to my over management.
  - Equipment
  - Bill Budd, again mentioned for creating the mating nucs
  - Mike Carnduff found styrofoam mating nucs we now use
- Forage and Feeding
  - Bob Bowser letting me see the impact his amazing forage has
  - Steve Petrelli whose artificial feeding cannot be stressed enough – FEED YOUR BEES.
- Leadership
  - Rich Ramsey created over 120 queens in August right after the fair in 2019!
  - Club leadership wholly embraced this endeavor... that made the real difference that counts.
  - A desire to see everyone succeed has allowed our club to grow by and above 110 members from zero 3 years ago.

# The bottom line

- Fun project brought the club together
- It added real value to members and was energizing!


- All hives utilized for queen rearing are donated by members.
- In the past the members would receive a cell and place in a mating nuc populated by colonies from their respective apiary(ies). This year however, a mating yard has been made and drone yards are being populated by swarm colonies caught the previous year (a check for disease) caught by our own members with swarm traps made by the volunteers in the wood work shop of Bill Budd!
- In addition the club will also offer mated queens! Utilizing the small styrofoam mating nucs, those that don't have the resources to start their own respective nucs shall have access to healthy mated queens that are ready and willing to lead a struggling colony back to health.

# Fat Queens

*“A well fed queen with good genetics will always be of higher quality and performance than a poorly fed queen with excellent genetics.” -  
Michael Palmer*

- The queens the club makes are enormous. The virgins are generally larger than the mated queens that arrive in packages every spring.
- After mating they are like giant zeppelins waddlin' across the frames.
- The packages receive hastily mated queens under dubious circumstances as they are literally on a schedule.
- With club queens we work *with the* bees when they are ready to make said queens. This understanding allows queens to be readily and plentifully produced under a flow, with excellent natural resources ***in abundance***.
- Our queen mothers are from our fellow members from hives who successfully overwintered with an excellent spring build up. Some mothers are over 4 years old!

# The Future

 Queen rearing provides real value to members and is very doable for local clubs

✓ This does not replace breeder queens, it supplements them.

! It's nice to have a ferrari but you can go where you need to go with any car that's well-maintained and has gas in it, in fact one could argue it would go further!

- Queen rearing as a club is only possible, and very beneficial.
- The benefit of getting people to understand not only the process, but to learn the why is paramount to excellence in beekeeping.
- This directly extends itself to the understanding *everything* about beekeeping. You kinda have to!
- Forage, management, planning... it ALL matters ever the more while raising queens of excellent quality.
- Ultimately, the club is looking to host local and nationally known speakers for presentations to advance bee knowledge.

# How to start?

- Members with bees willing to share
- Volunteers
- Someone willing to learn the methods to guide the club
- Free sharing of knowledge

- If you approach your club leadership to tackle something like this you will need bees... ideally someone with 10+ hives, or several members willing to donate the capped brood to make this happen.
- You can take advantage of a strong hive if you know what you are doing, but that is a wholly different presentation. The Michael Palmer method for queen raising is hammerhead proof. *You cannot screw it up.*
- You will need volunteers. And you will need someone to guide you initially. PSBA endeavors to have bee videos that help explain our process and what we do. I personally, have created a power point and am willing to come to central region clubs initially to help grow this knowledge with presentations.
- Our goal is sustainability with ethics. Our mission is to spread useful, game changing knowledge freely and to gain understanding from those willing to share.

# ISBA

- Advocacy and legislative supports
- Technical assistance and Education
- Clearinghouse of information
- Networking
- Very affordable membership
- 2 state meetings annually with vendor fair, speakers etc.

<https://www.ilsba.com/>

- The Illinois State Beekeepers Association provides local clubs with advocacy, information and assistance.
- Regional Directors are happy to support you in your goals and connect you to other clubs or beekeepers facing similar challenges to solve them together
- None of us are as smart as all of us put together.
- Summer meeting 2023 will be in Central IL - what would you like to see offered?

## How to apply the lesson to your club?

- Look to your members and find their talents
- Work together
- Be open
- Find volunteers! (easier when someone is passionate about something).

- Identify resources in your club – it may not be woodworking, but do you have soaps, candles, bee balms or the like?
- When beekeepers come together, their shared resources and knowledge is powerful.
- You don't need to be a big beekeeper to be big in beekeeping!

# **Above all, Beekeeping should always be fun.**

I have been blessed to become part of the PSBA  
and the ISBA.



Thank you!



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- Change the paradigm and challenge your club to grow. It is worthwhile and fun.
- The club keeps growing and our committees have a lot on their plates: Ethics pledge, minimal chem free management, nutrition, another mating yard, comb culling, and queen rearing variations are all on the horizon.