

# Life Style

ELKHORN INDEPENDENT



Above: This is one of the hives belonging to Rick Sallmann, of Delavan. He helped hive a swarm of honeybees that ended up at the fairgrounds on Labor Day. At right: A bonus to being a beekeeper is that the flowers, such as those pictured in Sallmann's yard, also attract butterflies including monarchs.

## HITCHIN' A RIDE

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### Swarm of bees brings a buzz to the county fair

The Walworth County Beekeepers Club had an exhibit at the fair, but even some of its members were caught a bit off guard on Labor Day when a swarm of bees hitched a ride to the fairgrounds – most likely in a demolition derby vehicle.

"I received a call that there was a swarm of bees on the track by some demolition derby cars. I went to check it out and identified them as honeybees," said Stephanie Slater, a member of the club.

As Slater was walking to the parking lot to gather some equipment, the swarm absconded, which means it went up in the air and the bees were flying in a group with the queen in the middle to protect her.

The swarm – after flying along the path of Highway 11 – turned around and eventually landed on the carousel horse near the main gate to the fairgrounds. At that point Slater decided to call a more experienced beekeeper to assist.

She called Rick Sallmann, of Delavan, who gathered what he needed – a box used to hive bees and five frames of honeycomb – and made his way to the fairgrounds.

"I hived the swarm by slowly brushing them into the box. Once the queen was in there, she gives off the pheromone and that attracts the other bees, so the rest went in fairly easily," Sallmann said.

But before the queen went in there, he was able to brush the bees because they tend to gorge themselves on the "home hive" before splitting off from it.

"When a hive gets too big it splits and half the bees will leave with the queen. In this case, they likely moved to the vehicle and then rode to the fairgrounds. But before leaving that home, or parent hive, they eat a lot to hold them over so they were pretty docile," Sallmann said.

Sallmann, who has been a beekeeper for 40 years, estimates there were 20,000 bees in the swarm and said he was pleased he was able to hive them without incident.

"They were very calm and that's really what I want people to understand. They're doing their job, and if you stay calm and don't move too fast, they generally won't harm you," he said.

Slater said fair security along with members of the Elkhorn police and



Left: Kathryn Dvorak, a member of the Walworth County Beekeepers Club, shows a family all the things going on in the observation hive the club had on exhibit at the recent county fair. Kids love finding the queen, club members said. Right: This swarm of bees likely rode to the Walworth County Fairgrounds in a wheel well of a

fire departments, helped by placing safety cones around the area and redirecting fairgoers.

#### EDUCATION IS KEY

While Sallmann was working to hive the bees, Slater used the opportunity to educate the crowd that had gathered to watch the excitement.

"This was a perfect demonstration of how docile a swarm of honeybees is and that people shouldn't be afraid and should never kill them," Slater said.

"It took very little time and we achieved the best possible outcome – the honeybees were relocated and there wasn't a single sting to anyone," she added.

Slater said swarming is common with honeybees, especially in the spring, and people that encounter a swarm are encouraged to call the beekeepers club or a beekeeper they know to help safely relocate it.

"Last year, beekeepers in the United States lost over 40 percent of their honeybees. This is a big problem for everyone since every third bite we take is dependent upon pollinators like honeybees," Slater

explained. She said there are a few relatively easy things people can do to help honeybees, including:

- Allow dandelions to bloom as they are the first food source for honeybees after a long winter;
- Reduce and/or eliminate pesticide use;
- Provide water sources such as marbles or rocks on a pie plate or bird bath;
- Plant more flowering trees, shrubs and flowers;
- Support your local beekeeper by buying local honey.

"Anyone can do those things, even people who don't want to become a beekeeper," Slater said.

#### ABOUT THE CLUB

The Walworth County Beekeepers Club meets the third Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. at Gateway Technical College in Elkhorn.

"Guests are always invited to come and visit one of our meetings and can join the club for only \$10 per year," Slater said.

The club's website is under construction, but people will be able



demolition derby car and then relocated to the carousel horse near the entrance. With help from the local beekeepers club, the swarm – which contained an estimated 20,000 bees – was hived and no one was stung in the process.

to access the website soon. Slater said each month, after a brief business meeting, the club features an educational workshop that correlates to what's going on in the bee yard and/or the chores they should be doing at that time.

"We aim to provide education to beekeepers of all skill levels; beginners, intermediate and advanced," she said.

Among the many benefits of joining a local beekeepers club are the following: timely education; access to educational resources; networking and mentoring opportunities; volunteer opportunities; and fellowship.

The Walworth County Beekeepers Club publishes a monthly newsletter and maintains an active Facebook group for members only.

Among the events they can be found at providing public education each year is the annual Walworth County Dairy Breakfast in June and the Walworth County Fair in the fall.

This year the club will participate in a bonus event.

"We are excited to also be participating in the Homegrown

Village at Farm Aid at Alpine Valley on Sept. 21," Slater said.

She said members of the beekeepers club are more than happy to share their knowledge.

"Upon invitation, we will provide workshops at libraries and in classrooms," Slater said.

Sallmann said he became interested in bees as a young child.

"I saw a honeycomb and was curious so learned about it and that stuck with me. Later I learned more and eventually I bought out a guy selling his honey business," he said.

Sallmann said he and other club members enjoy educating people.

"We care about the bees. They have a job to do and are very important, so we want people to understand that," he said.

The website for the Walworth County Beekeepers Club (once it's updated) is walworthcountybeeclub.com.

Other area clubs include: Racine Kenosha Beekeepers Club, rkbeekeepers.org; Milwaukee Mawkesha Beekeeper's Association, mwbeekeepers.org; Dodge Jefferson Beekeepers, dodgejeffersonbeekeepers.com.