

The Bee Line

Newsletter of the Oregon State Beekeepers Association

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Mites: OSU, entomologists world-wide probe for clues to survival of honeybee

By David Stauth
OSU News & Communications Services

CORVALLIS- For years now, Oregon State University entomologists have traveled across four continents, from deserts to steaming tropical jungles and temperate croplands searching for clues.

In Russia, Uruguay, Egypt, China and Thailand, they've watched bees "groom" themselves.

They've watched bees throw defective larvae out of their hives. They've watched bees, one of nature's most social animals, help clean each other up. They've watched bee colonies thrive while others perish. All in the search for clues.

"We're looking for anything we can find that sheds light on why some bee species can resist parasitic mites and others can't," said Michael Burgett, a professor of entomology and internationally recognized honeybee expert.

"We study genetics, behavior patterns, all the differences that have developed over hundreds of years of evolution."

The research is fundamental at this stage, Burgett said, but the overlying problem is very real and imminent. Mite parasites, especially varroa and tracheal mites, have invaded the vulnerable European honeybee species common to the United States and now threaten a multi-billion dollar industry.

Chemical control of these mites is impossible for wild bees, and difficult even with managed hives handled on a commercial basis, says Burgett.

Enlisting chemical "miticides" are often expensive to buy and use. They raise the cost of pollination and honey production. Their use doesn't help the image of honey as a pure food product.

But most importantly, the chemicals used for mite control, like many other pesticides, may soon become ineffective as the mites develop a natural resistance. This resistance already has been documented by some beekeepers.

For those reasons, researchers at OSU and around the world are anxious to find out why the European honeybee, so vital to agriculture in much of the world, is also so vulnerable to parasitic mites. And why other bees are not.

This research has taken the scientists back to the ancestral home of the honeybee in Asia and Africa, Burgett said. They've studied dwarf honeybees in Thailand, various African species, and the giant honeybees that prefer jungle cliffs for their homes.

One of Burgett's colleagues, Christine Peng, did a pioneering study in China that identified key behavioral characteristics that make the Indian honeybee, an ancient ancestor of the European bee, resistant to mites.

"This species has a very active and aggressive grooming behavior," Burgett said. "When an adult bee gets a mite on it, it tries to take it off by grooming. If that doesn't work, its nest mates help to clean it off."

The same species also inspects for mites that burrow their way into immature "brood" cells in the colony. If a mite is found in the more numerous worker cells, that cell and mite are attacked and thrown from the hive.

However, if the bees find a mite burrowed into a male, or drone bee cell, they usually leave it alone.

"This is the natural evolution of a good parasite-host relationship," Burgett said. "The parasite doesn't succeed in killing its host and lets some of the parasites survive. That way they both can live."

But when these same parasites get thrust into bee colonies that are not naturally conditioned for them, Burgett said, problems develop.

European bees also groom themselves, but not so actively as to get rid of mites, researchers have found. They may eventually start throwing infested larvae out of the colony, but often not until it is too late and the problem is overwhelming. The colony dies.

The problems these mites pose to agriculture in this country is immediate and serious, Burgett said. Because of that, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recently imported and is distributing bee colonies from Yugoslavia that it believes have some resistance to mite infestations.

Similar research is underway in a major study in Florida, which had some of the nation's first problems with varroa mites.

"The goal is to identify and understand as many traits as possible that provide some resistance to mites," Burgett said. "Then, if we know what we're looking for, we may be able to identify colonies of European bees that have better mite resistance, and try to cultivate those traits in colonies."

So they watch bees, and study and learn. Night and day. From Russia to Thailand to South America and northern Africa. And Oregon.

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Editorial comments:

Why I chose what appears in this issue:

* Articles about mite research by David Stauth (pages 1 and 3): Oregon State University News and Communication Services sent these to Associated Press newspapers.

I don't think the articles appeared as written, but reporters writing about mite losses in their areas consulted OSU entomologist Mike Burgett.

Mike told me Stauth's stories were accurate. It seemed to me beekeepers enduring losses to mites ought to know more about them.

I hoped reading these would promote your interest in attending OSBA'S annual meeting Dec. 3-4 at Lincoln City. The program includes a talk on his mite losses by Colton beekeeper George Hansen and a report about the latest research here and elsewhere by Mike Burgett.

* Carol and Myron Shenk: They are typical of hobbyists. Like commercial beekeepers they are not immune to mites and lost hives. They seemed like a good couple to focus on. And, I like to push 4-H. I hope to report about a group 4-H project led by several members of the Tillamook Beekeepers Association.

(Ideas for such stories are always welcome.)

* Conference news: Very important at this time not only because of the mite problem - - but because it's just a good idea for beekeepers to get together. And to always stick together.

* And photographs: David Stauth sent Burgett's. Maybe seeing Mike at work on the cover made you decide to open the newsletter - - and read it.

Connie Petty

Parasitic mites will ravage farmers and orchard growers

By David Stauth
OSU News & Communication Services

CORVALLIS- A crisis with parasitic mites that are now ravaging the California beekeeping industry may be a prelude to problems that will soon face farmers, orchard growers and honey producers in the Pacific Northwest.

The growing impact of varroa mites, and to a lesser extent tracheal mites, are now causing widespread mortality of bee colonies in California, said an apiculture expert at Oregon State University.

"In some areas of California, beekeepers have lost 50 percent of their hives in the past couple years," said Michael Burgett, an OSU professor of entomology, "A lot of people are going to go out of business before they learn how to control these mites."

In Oregon, about 15 to 20 percent of the state's farm commodity income is directly influenced by the pollination activities of bees. The estimated farm-gate value of crops pollinated by honeybees in 1992 was slightly less than \$400 million in Oregon.

In Washington. The apple industry by itself had a value of \$950 million. In combination with the value of other tree fruit crops, berries and vegetables, the value of bee-pollinated crops in the two states approaches \$2 billion.

A few dozen professional beekeepers in Oregon and Washington are responsible for most of the commercial pollination activities, officials say.

The problems with parasitic mites, which can variably affect either adult honeybees or their immature larvae, are not unexpected, Burgett said. They've been predicted for years.

Experts have been warning beekeepers about the potential threat posed by them since the mites, native primarily to Asia, were first discovered in the U.S. in 1984.

Some chemicals are available that can help protect hives against the mites. But Burgett said they are costly, not totally effective and have not been widely used in the past.

Also significant, he said, is the impact these mites will have on wild colonies of honeybees, which are responsible for much agricultural pollination and the health of other flowering plant or tree species.

"In a recent study in California a researcher found that about 80 percent of the wild honeybee colonies had died," Burgett said. Similar problems can be expected in Oregon, he said, which is already infested with both varroa and tracheal mites in colonies across the state.

Climatic differences between the two regions have slowed mite reproduction rates and made problems in the Pacific Northwest develop somewhat more slowly than warmer areas further south, he said. Impacts in Oregon and Washington should rise dramatically in the next year or two, Burgett said.

"Our problems with these mites are a little like AIDS," Burgett said. "We aren't sure how bad things are, what to expect, how to treat it or what to do. But it's clear that the situation is now quickly getting worse."

Oregon Farm Bureau executive to address beekeepers at annual convention Dec. 3-4

Andy Anderson, executive vice president of the Oregon Farm Bureau Federation, will be a guest speaker at OSBA's Dec. 3-4 convention at the Shilo Inn in Lincoln City. He will speak on the influence of urban life on rural Oregon at the 6:30 p.m. banquet Saturday evening, Dec. 4.

Anderson was raised on a cattle ranch in Alaska. He holds a master's degree in public administration from Boise State University. He has been associated with the natural resource industry most of his life. Prior to coming to Oregon, he was president of the Associated Taxpayers of Idaho and of the Idaho Petroleum Council, a division of the Rocky Mountain Oil and Gas Association. He also worked six years in the Public Affairs Division of the Idaho Farm Bureau.

In Idaho, he served on several Governor's task forces and was a member of the Citizens Advisory Council of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM.)

See pages 4 and 9 for more OSBA convention information.



Andy Anderson

Oregon State Beekeepers Association ANNUAL CONVENTION

When: Friday and Saturday, December 3 and 4, 1993
Where: Shilo Inn, 1501 N.W. 40th Place, Lincoln City, OR 97367

Convention Highlights

- Hospitality room Friday evening: Cheese, wine, honey sweets
 - Registration/coffee hour, 8 to 9 a.m., Saturday
- Beekeeping problems (mites, Africanized bees, etc.) Saturday morning
- Research Benefit Luncheon, noon Saturday: Dr. Michael Burgett, speaker
 - More about beekeeping and business meeting, Saturday afternoon
- No-host social hour, silent auction, banquet and live auction, 6 p.m. Saturday

Pre-registration/hotel reservation deadline: Nov., 22, 1993

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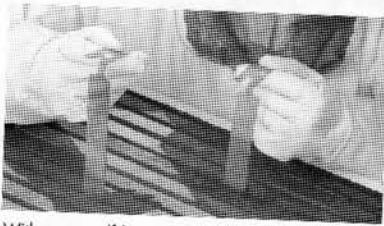
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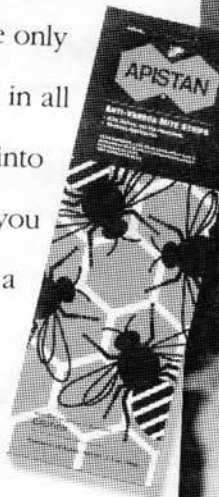
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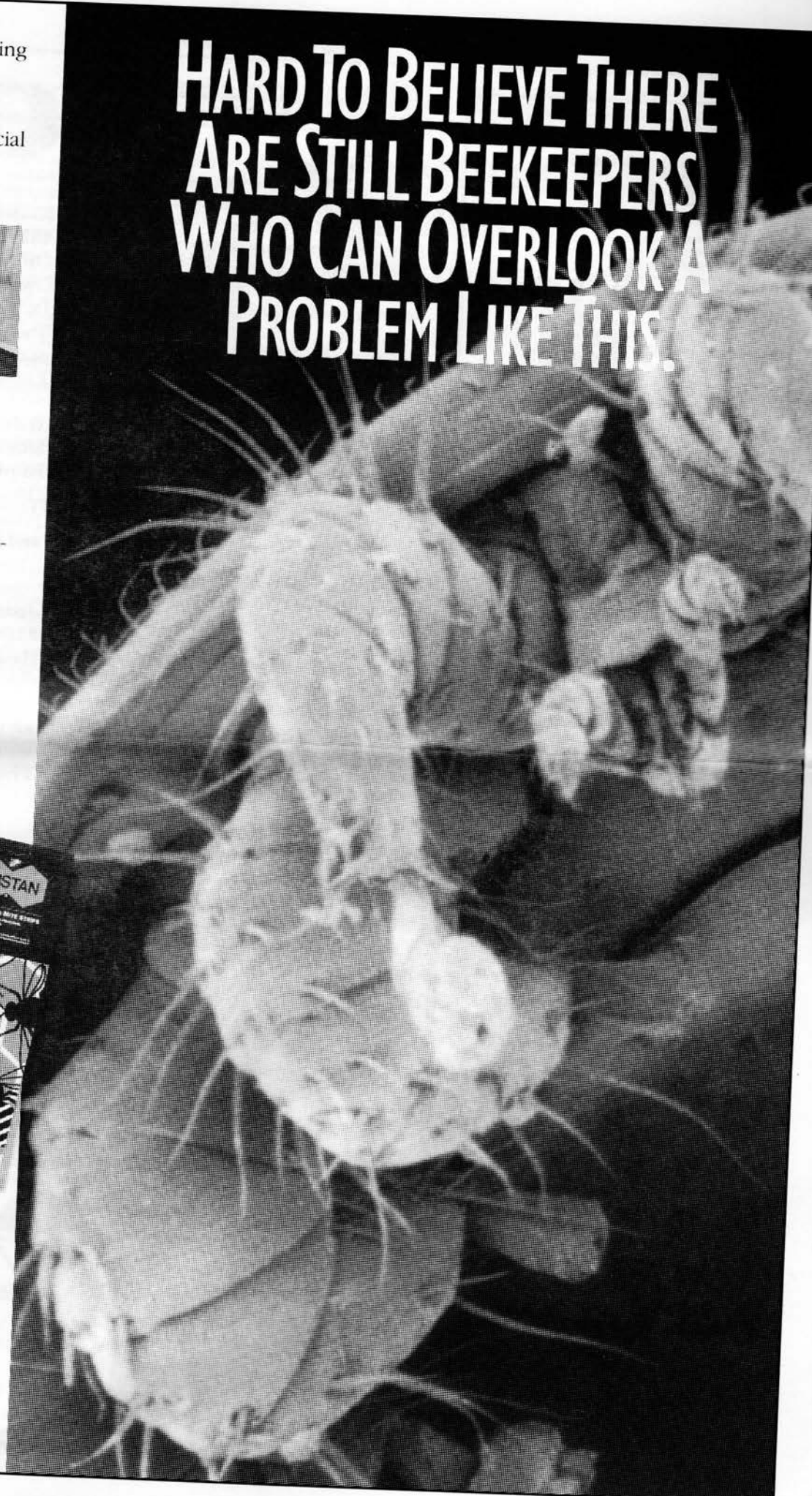


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Publications increase prices, offer discounts for OSBA members

Gleanings in Bee Culture and The American Bee Journal have increased prices, effective Oct. 1, 1993. Both offer a 25 percent discount to members of the Oregon State Beekeepers Association.

Gleanings subscriptions are now \$12.25 for one year and \$22.50 for two.

New prices for American Bee Journal are: 1 year, \$16.20 or \$12.15 for OSBA members; 2 years, \$30.12 or \$22.59, and 3 years, \$43.68 or \$32.76. Foreign subscriptions for one-year are \$24.95 or \$20.90 for OSBA members, or for a two years, \$47.62 or \$40.09 for OSBA members.

To order magazines, use the form on page 11.

The Journal also offers a discount on the new edition of "The Hive and the Honey Bee." The regular price for the hard-bound beekeeper's "Bible" is \$36. If an association pools an order, the cost is \$27 for 8 or more copies and \$25.65 for 24 or more. Shipping costs are additional, unless copies are picked up at a Dadant outlet. Contact your branch association officers or the OSBA secretary.



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Hobby beekeepers suffer heavy mite losses

By Marilyn Weatherly

When twin sons Jon and Tim took off for college a year ago, their parents decided to take over the bees the boys had kept as a 4-H project.

However, Myron and Carol Shenk didn't foresee that within a year, Varroa mites would nearly wipe out their good intentions.

One day last month, when Myron checked the hives, he was stunned to find 11 of their 17 hives empty, even though he had checked them just five days before. The culprit —the Varroa mite.

"It was like losing your own family," said Carol.

Since 1984, beekeeping has been a Shenk family activity through their now-grown sons - Dan, Jon and Tim, who were members of Oliver Petty's Honey Hustlers 4-H club in North Albany.

Myron and Carol decided to "babysit" the bees, in case one of their sons wants to expand the beekeeping operation when he finishes college. Tim is especially interested in beekeeping.

Before the mite losses, Myron had considered expanding to 50 or more colonies and buying a truck on which to mount a hoist.

Nearly half the hives were caught as swarms by their sons.

Now Myron says, "We'll keep the six hives as long as we can. If we get called to get a swarm, we will, but otherwise we aren't going to rebuild until Tim comes back."

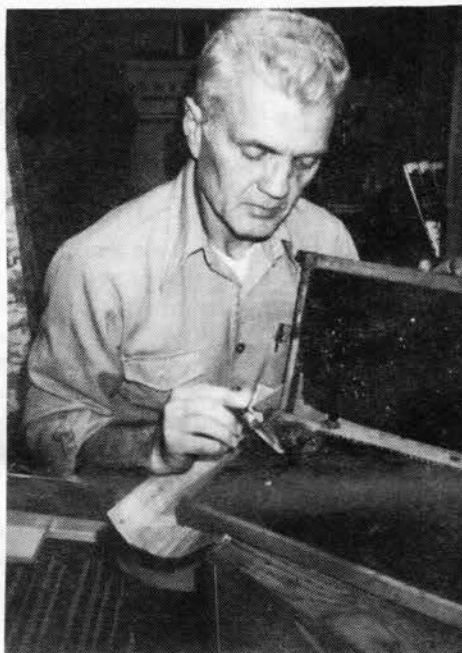
The Shenks keep bees in their spare time: Myron works with the hives and Carol bottles and sells the honey.

Carol, a retired teacher, went back to work this fall when she was offered a position as special education and Chapter I coordinator for the Detroit School District. She commutes from Albany to work with students in kindergarten through grade 12.

Myron holds a master's degree in general agronomy from OSU. He has worked 27

years for the university and is now a coordinator for Extension Pesticide Applicator Training. He spent 25 years with OSU's International Plant Protection Center, now the Integrated Plant Protection Center.

In the 1970s, Myron's job took them to Latin America. The family lived for 27 months in Ecuador, 27 months in Brazil, and six years



Myron Shenk shows damage by Varroa mites. The North Albany resident manages bees his sons kept as a 4-H project.

in Costa Rica.

In 1976, they bought property in North Albany and returned to make their home here in 1982. Myron has continued doing some overseas work in Africa and Pakistan, as well as Latin America.

Keeping bees has become a Shenk family hobby. During the first "taking off" of honey this summer, their 17 hives yielded 700 pounds. Oliver Petty extracted the honey for them and Carol bottled it in jars of every shape imaginable given to her by friends.

Some filled jars found their way back to

friends. Carol sold honey to a health food store, clients and at Albany's Farmer's Market.

The Shenks planned to wait until after a second honey harvest this fall before treating the hives for mites. But by the time Myron was ready to apply the mite strips, the deadly Varroa mites had already ravaged the bees.

Heavy mite losses have alarmed commercial and hobbyist beekeepers throughout the state. The subject will be discussed extensively at the Oregon State Beekeepers Association's annual conference Dec. 3-5 at Shilo Inn in Lincoln City.

The Shenks' beekeeping activities began when oldest son Dan joined the Honey Hustlers 4-H Club. Dan, 23, who graduated *summa cum laude* from Eastern Mennonite College in Harrisonburg, Va., is now a volunteer for a food bank operated by the Mennonite Board of Missions in Washington D.C. He also uses Spanish language skills as he works with refugees from Central America. Dan recently announced his engagement to marry and has applied for graduate schools.

Alicia, 22, the Shenks' only daughter, was active in 4-H rabbit and sewing projects. The registered nurse recently began caring for health needs of 900 people in a Spanish community in Colorado through Voluntary Service with the Mennonite Board of Missions.

Jon and Tim, who graduated from West Albany High School in 1992, stayed in 4-H until their 19th birthday (the age limited for 4-H membership).

Now, 20, both are students at Hesston College, a two-year Mennonite college in Hesston, Kan.

Jon is interested in missionary aviation. Tim plans to pursue engineering at Oregon State University.

Carol and Myron Shenk said one of the rewards of being a 4-H family has been their friendship with Oliver Petty and the information they gained about beekeeping while

working with him.

Myron marvels at Oliver's 35-year commitment as a 4-H leader and the influence Oliver has had on young, sometimes rowdy, club members. "He has done so much," Myron said.

Despite their losses to mites, the Shenks really want to continue keeping bees as long as they can. Myron said they feel as their son, Tim, does: Part of Tim's attraction is watching God's creative powers at work in these bees.

Carol Shenk (left) weighs honey to be sold at Albany's Farmer's Market.

(Photos by Marilyn Weatherly)



Highlights:

Fall conference schedules talks on mite research, queen breeding, Africanized bees, pollen sources

Lu Alexander, Oregon State Beekeepers Association vice president, has planned a full program for the 1993 fall conference at the Shilo Inn at Lincoln City. The program will take place Saturday, Dec. 4, however, beekeepers are urged to come for a get-together beginning at 6 p.m. Friday, Dec. 3.

Registration will be from 8 to 9 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 4. President John Mespelt will give the welcome, followed by a report on mite research by Dr. Michael Burgett. Burgett will also speak at the noon Research Luncheon. At 10 a.m., Colton beekeeper George Hansen will speak on foulbrood and other diseases, and at 3 p.m., give a perspective on losses to mites.

Guest speakers include queen breeders Binford Weaver, Navasota, Texas, and Pat Heitkam, Orland, California, at 11:15 a.m. Both will also speak on imported honey at 2 p.m. Weaver, the new chairman of the National Honey Board, will also talk about honey marketing at 1:30 p.m.

More topics and speakers: Africanized bees, 10:30 a.m., Lu Alexander and Dr. Burgett; Honey marketing, 1:30 p.m., by Joann Olstrom, Reedsport, and Weaver; Oregon honey/pollen sources, 2:15 p.m., Bertie Stringer, Blodgett; Urban influence on rural Oregon, 6:30 p.m., Andy Anderson, executive vice president, Oregon Farm Bureau Federation. (See story, page 3).

Other events: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Silent Auction; 11:45 a.m., legislation affecting beekeepers; 3:30 p.m. business meeting/election of officers; 5:30 p.m., no-host social hour; 7:30 p.m., Annual Awards and Oral Auction. **Please remember to bring donations for the auctions.**

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President: Lee Zigler, 1-688-5675

Vice president: Jeff Darling, 1-741-1582

Secretary: Christine Erwin, 1-942-7061

Treasurer: Jim Sheridan, 1-344-1354

Portland Area

Meets 7:30 p.m. fourth Monday,

Far West Federal Bank,
McLoughlin Blvd., Oregon City

President: Lewis Morgan, 1-775-2796

Vice president: Frank Courtway, 1-761-2961

Secretary: Carol/Scott McConnachle, 1-665-4241

Southern Oregon

Meets 7:30 p.m. first Monday;
Ag Extension Auditorium
Maple Park Drive, Medford

President: Rob Behrend, 1-664-3426

Vice president: John Campbell

Secretary: Lynne Behrend, 1-664-3426

Tillamook County

Meets 7 p.m. first Thursday,
Fish & Wildlife Bldg.,
4909 Third St., Tillamook

President: Bob Allen, 1-322-3819

Vice president: Fritz Hoffman, 1-842-6856

Secretary-treasurer: Gregg Cline, 1-842-6323

Tualatin Valley

Meets 7:30 p.m. second Monday;
PGE Building,
Old Scholls Ferry Road & Murray,
Beaverton

President: James Marshall, 1-642-3319

Vice president: George Robins, 1-244-5746

Secretary-treasurer: PattiJo Campbell, 1-648-9820

Willamette Valley

Meets 7:30 p.m. fourth Monday;
Room 32B,
Chemeketa Community College, Salem

President: Walt Nichol, 1-585-5705

Vice president: Darrell Gulstrom

Secretary: Hamid Kaskale

Treasurer: Fritz Skirvin, 1-581-9372

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FOR SALE: 10-frame boxes, full depth, semi and westerns, \$3 each. Lids and bottom boards, \$1.50 each. Volume discount. Garry Seeley, Salem. Phone: 1-503-792-3523.

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PRE-REGISTER: Oregon State Beekeepers Association annual meeting, Dec. 3-4, Shilo Inn, Lincoln City. (Return pre-registration form today.)

Please send your business card and the form below (or use a separate piece of paper with the information:

Name of business: _____

Owner/owners: _____

Street address: _____

City, state and zip code: _____

Telephone number: _____

Services, what you sell or do: _____

Mail to:

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1033 Gibson Hill Road N.W.,
Albany, Or. 97321

Questions?
Phone Connie Petty,
1-928-7924 or 1-926-8718

Membership and Publications

Membership in the Oregon State Beekeepers Association is open to anyone who has an interest in bees and beekeeping. You do not need to own bees or reside in Oregon to join.

OSBA Membership: \$15 per person. Includes 10 issues of the BEE LINE and a vote in all OSBA elections. If you belong to a local group, which one? _____ (Your local gets \$1 of your dues.)

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Dr. Mike Burgett: Read about latest mite research on pages 1 and 3

Oregon State Beekeepers Association

The Bee Line

Connie Petty, editor
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