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This convention is the bees' knees

By DENNIS ROSENBLUM

Fritz Sanders is all buzz over next week's big convention in Dearborn. It's expected to be just a honey of a time.

Sanders' hobby, you see, is beekeeping. And both hobbyists and commercial apiarists will be swarming into town from throughout the country for their annual convention at the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

The meeting, running Jan. 21-25, includes exhibits of honey, beeswax and equipment, a seminar for beginners, various speakers and, of course, the crowning of the American Honey Queen.

Registration is \$10 per person for all events, except meals. Various educational sessions will discuss how to deal with the adulteration of honey, diseases and nutrition, desensitizing humans from stings, soybean pollination and the like.

The film "Killer Bees: Fact or Fantasy?" will run at 1 p.m. Tuesday. Dr. Robert Byberg of Cranbrook will lead a seminar for beginning beekeepers 1-5 p.m. next Wednesday, explaining how to start a colony, buy equipment and deal with it all.

All honey included in displays and judging will be auctioned at 5 p.m. Thursday. Registration is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

'People think bees are just good for getting stung.'

— Fritz Sanders

daily, the exhibits are open to 6 p.m.

SANDERS, WHO maintains two hives in his backyard in Livonia, three in Westland and two at Schoolcraft College, got hooked on the hobby in 1976 when he was helping a friend clear out a hive in his yard.

"It becomes such a natural thing after awhile," he says. "It seems odd because people don't know much about bees."

"You look back a hundred years or so and everybody was doing it."

For him, the benefits of beekeeping are both in the fascination of the hobby and in the usefulness of it.

"In today's economy, if we eradicate honeybees, we would have famine," he says.

On the hobby side, Sanders, an engineer for Volkswagen, gets to study nature at work and uses his other hobbies of photography, woodworking and metalworking. He's constructed his own extractor, which uses centrifugal force to separate the honey from the combs.

ALL THIS is not without problems, though.

Sanders figures he gets stung around 10 times a year or so. But he doesn't worry about it.

"They leave you alone unless you don't leave them alone," he explains.

"I don't like to disturb them more than necessary."

His neighbors have mixed feelings about all the little buggers. One of them got the city to take him to court a couple years back in an attempt to get rid of the hives. Sanders won the case.

But another neighbor, who has a cherry tree in his yard, is just delighted. He's been getting bumper crops of cherries, thanks to the bees pollinating the flowers.

"People think bees are just good for getting stung," Sanders says.

Honey, he says, is much healthier than plain white sugar. His family uses it instead of sugar and goes through about 70 pounds a year.

"A lot of people are lacking nutrition. Well, there's the perfect food for you."

He suggests beekeeping is a perfect hobby for retirees. It can be done in a yard and the honey makes for great eating.

SANDERS FIGURES he's invested maybe \$400 in equipment for his seven hives. Queen bees — one per hive — are sold through the mail for \$6-7. A used hive, including a small swarm, goes for \$50.

But then it's a hobby. Sanders knows all about worker bees (females who can't reproduce) and drones (non-stinging males who die from mating).

He can show you a honeycomb in which the worker bees are making room for a queen bee she gets more space than the others.

He'll tell you about the workers selecting an egg to become a new queen bee if the old one dies. And he'll tell you about the differences between honeybees and the nasty critters like hornets that most people confuse with his little friends.

"If you kill bees, it's just like killing the goose that lays golden eggs," he says.

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Fritz Sanders stands amid his beekeeping paraphernalia in the basement of his home, awaiting next week's convention in Dearborn. (Staff photo by Art Emanuele)

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