

ADDISON COUNTY INDEPENDENT

Vol. 28 No. 30

Middlebury, Vermont

Monday, October 31, 2016

36 Pages

\$1.00

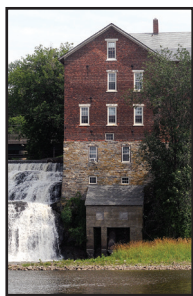


Celtic culture in Vermont

• A bodhrán player will speak about the influence of Ireland, Scotland and Wales on the Green Mountain State. Page 30.

Property owner takes city to court

• The owner of a prominent building at the Vergennes falls says restrictions are unfair. See Page 3.



MUHS football takes on Essex

• Tiger football and the Otter field hockey and football teams were all looking to win playoff games. See Pages 20-22.



Duo to perform classical crossover

• A pianist and marimba player will combine sounds and rhythm in a Brandon concert. See Arts Beat on Page 10.

County's bees healthier than in many other parts of U.S.

Beekeepers say pesticides still top the list of threats

By GAEN MURPHREE

ADDISON COUNTY — Addison County is a good place to be a bee compared to many other parts of the country, local beekeepers report. And that's a good thing.

"Roughly one-third of the food we eat is pollinated by bees," according to Cornwall beekeeper Andrew Munkres.

Nevertheless, honey bees and other pollinators here continue to face serious challenges from parasites, from climate change, and most especially

from an increased presence of pesticides and other toxins in crops and in the environment.

Given honeybees' critical role in creating our food, understanding how to reverse this trend is important to ordinary folks and dedicated beekeepers alike.

"Even though we're having some troubles, it's far, far worse in a lot of the country," said New Haven beekeeper Kirk Webster, whose business is called Champlain Valley Bees and Queens. "I hear that all the time from my customers (in other states).

"What worries me is that Vermont could become like some of these other places if the use

(See Bees, Page 26)

\$441,000 facelift to transform historic Cornwall Town Hall

By JOHN FLOWERS

CORNWALL — Cornwall Town Clerk Sue Johnson will soon be trading her town hall office for a very tiny, Spartan workspace in a nearby trailer.

No, she's not being banished by community leaders. She's just going to have to go through some short-term pain for the eventual gain of a renovated Cornwall Town Hall, which will feature a new roof, new quarters for the municipal library, additional

(See Cornwall, Page 14)



ELINOR THOMPSON VISITS with friends during Lincoln's annual flu clinic and Halloween party last Thursday morning at the United Church of Lincoln. Weathervane has provided the party and other outreach to Lincoln seniors for three decades. Independent photo/Trent Campbell

Flu shots mix with fun at Lincoln Halloween party

By GAEN MURPHREE

LINCOLN — Every October for 30 years, organizers at Weathervane Outreach in Lincoln have reached out to seniors (and to whoever walks through the door) to provide a listening ear, tasty food, a good laugh and a chance to rock

an awesome costume at an annual Halloween party.

And, yes, there are also blood pressure checks and flu shots.

The theme of this year's party, which was held last Thursday in the United Church of Lincoln, was "The Holidays." The costumes and

decorations celebrated not just Halloween but Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine's Day, Easter and the Fourth of July, too.

Linda Norton got in the spirit by sporting a black choir robe decorated with vintage postcards celebrating holidays from the 365 days of

the year.

"My costume is like my personality — I'm all over the place," she said good-naturedly.

The party started in 1986, said Lorraine Patterson, who's been organizing Weathervane events since (See Lincoln, Page 25)



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Bees

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of these things continues or is not controlled somehow.”

‘WEIRD THINGS GOING ON’

Charles Mraz of Champlain Valley Apiaries in Middlebury is a third-generation beekeeper. His grandfather, also Charles Mraz, started the apiary in 1931, and they’ve been producing and packing honey ever since. So when Mraz says that bees aren’t acting normal, his observations are based not just on his own but on his father’s and grandfather’s experience.

“We have a lot of weird things gone on,” said Mraz. “My concerns are that the bees are not functioning normally. There’s problems that we’re seeing that aren’t consistent with how they’ve been at all. I’m especially concerned about bees’ success in superseding.”

Supersedure, Mraz explained, is the process by which bees replace an old or failing queen with a new one. It’s the process by which queens come and go every year but the colony lives on for-

ever. Worker bees select several eggs, feed them more royal jelly, a “virgin” queen emerges, destroys her competitors, then finally flies off to mate with the drones and then returns to begin her reign, laying all the eggs for the colony’s next generation. Summer is when new queens emerge most successfully, said Mraz, and is when new colonies with new queens should be at their most thriving because of warm temperatures and the abundance of forage.

But lately, Mraz said he’ll start up a new colony, known as “nucleus” or “nuc,” provide it with a good supply of honey and bees and brood, and just when the numbers should be rising and the new colony starting to thrive, it will tank or be reduced drastically.

“We’ve had bee hives — 25 years that hive would just continue and continue and continue. The hive would produce honey every year and go on seamlessly. But that seems to not be happening well any more,” said Mraz.



DESPITE A NATIONWIDE decline in honeybee numbers because of increased use of chemicals and climate change, Andrew Munkres of Lemonfair Honeyworks said Vermont bees are generally doing OK because beekeepers are getting smarter.

Independent photo/Trent Campbell

“We’re seeing it worse and worse.” And now it’s not just losing bees in the winter, but also in the summer —

primetime for honey making.

“We come into the bee yards near harvest time sometimes and have huge colonies and all of a sudden they’re all robbed out. They’re empty,” he said.

Champlain Valley Apiaries raises hundreds of these nucleus colonies each summer, but this past summer the success rate was the worst in years. And it wasn’t because of the weather; many hives failed to thrive during a good honey flow.

“So it just doesn’t make any sense,” Mraz said. “Those are the types of things that, if you asked

my grandfather he’d say, ‘No that doesn’t happen.’”

NEONICOTINOIDS

Mraz, along with many beekeepers and researchers, suspect the primary culprit is pesticides, especially a kind called neonicotinoids.

“There is no good pesticide as far as bees are concerned,” said Mraz.

Likewise, Webster said his main worry is “the poisoning of the environment,” especially with “agricultural poisons.” For Webster this challenge, “which we didn’t use to (See Mraz, Page 27)

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Hatch 31
31 Main Street
Bristol • 453-2774
20% of sales on Nov 4-5

Green Peppers Restaurant
10 Washington St.
Middlebury • 388-3164
15% of sales on Oct 17, 24, Nov 7, 14

Middlebury Inn Morgan’s Tavern
14 Court Square
Middlebury • 388-4961
15% of sales from November 9-11

51 Main
51 Main Street
Middlebury • 388-8209
Donating meals to families in need.

Daily Chocolate
7 Green St.
Vergennes • 877-0087
10% of sales from November 1-5

Fire & Ice Restaurant
26 Seymour St.
Middlebury • 388-7166
10% of sales on November 17 & 22

Bobcat Café
5 Main St
Bristol • 453-3311
20% sales on November 9

Storm Café
3 Mill St.
Middlebury • 388-1063
10% of breakfast & lunch sales November 8-10

Jessica’s at Swift House Inn
Stewart Lane
Middlebury • 388-9925
Donating \$1 per person who dines at Jessica’s

Mary’s at Baldwin Creek
1868 North Rt 116
Bristol • 453-2432
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Mraz

(Continued from Page 26)

have to worry about much here," is the real existential crisis for bee-keeping.

Mraz testified in Montpelier recently and made a careful distinction between an outright ban on neonicotinoids and a more discriminating approach. He said orchardists have reduced their chemical use drastically and are using neonicotinoids responsibly with integrated pest management.

"The real problem is that the chemical and seed companies are putting all these chemicals on seed coatings. And they went and got the seed coatings classified as 'treated articles' ... so that they wouldn't be regulated by state and federal pesticide authorities."

As Mraz described it, seed companies coat corn and soybean seed to prevent a range of disease and insect problems, but don't offer farmers the option to purchase untreated seed or seed treated for pests and diseases likely to be encountered in their particular area.

"They're using a prophylactic seed treatment, same chemicals used in Texas as used in Vermont as used in California, Nevada — it doesn't matter where you are. A third to half of those chemicals ... we don't even have the pests for them probably," said Mraz.

Webster noted that he now tries to keep his bee yards clear of corn and soy fields.

"A few years ago was the one time I was really sure something had poisoned the bees," said Webster. "I had one location that was right next to a great big cornfield, sort of wrapped around two sides of it. And the pre-

vailing wind just blew right across there from the field right onto the bee yard all the time. And for two years in a row those bees all just went downhill and fell apart right in early June, which is usually when they're building up to their peak."

Webster would like to see more emphasis on organic farming.

Beekeepers know how important local farming is to their operations and emphasize a cooperative approach in figuring out how to help bees.

Still, Mraz, who runs one of the state's largest apiaries, with hives in Addison, Chittenden and Franklin counties, notices that his Chittenden County bees and bees in places where there's pastures and haying but less corn and soybean production tend to do better in recent years.

OTHER CONCERNS
Parasitic varroa mites continue to be a problem for bees nationwide.

Webster was an early pioneer in not treating bees chemically to kill the mites, but instead breeding in mite-resistant Russian bee strains to fight the plague. He feels that the mites aren't so much a problem in his apiary. Mraz uses an organic treatment and breeding to combat mites.

Munkres, who runs Lemonfair Honeyworks, also uses what he calls the "Darwin approach" to control mites through breeding in a number of different mite-resistant strains. He likens many of the chemical mite treatments to chemotherapy — the treatments destroy the mites but weaken the bees.

He said the mite problem is a good example of how "bees are doing OK but it's partly because the beekeepers are getting smarter."

"The real problem is that the chemical and seed companies are putting all these chemicals on seed coatings. And they went and got the seed coatings classified as 'treated articles' ... so that they wouldn't be regulated by state and federal pesticide authorities."

— Charles Mraz

Munkres himself is especially concerned about upcoming effects of climate change and the ways it's likely to throw the intricate interworkings of the seasons out of whack.

"Elsewhere in the United States there have been dearths of blooms in mid-summer where nectar has had to be supplied to the bees," said Munkres.

Looking at the litany of challenges facing honeybees, local beekeepers

also emphasized how difficult it can be to definitively pin down the bees' current struggles to any one thing.

"All are potential problems and the research that I've seen has yet to agree on any one cause," Munkres said. "If people ask me I usually say, 'E. All of the above.'"

Mraz encouraged Addison County residents to create safe havens for bees — even just planting a little bee balm and then sitting back to enjoy the show when pollinators come

buzzing.

"I think awareness is crucial. Awareness that there's problems and anything you can do in your own garden or yard to help pollinators is crucial. To give them a safe environment and safe forage where they can thrive.

"Bees are incredibly adaptable," Mraz added. "But we're coming at them faster than they can adapt."

Email reporter Gaen Murphree at gaenm@addisonindependent.com.

Mari Cordes for Addison-4 Lincoln, Starksboro, Monkton and Bristol

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For Vermont House

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"We have no doubt at all that faced with difficult problems, Mari would be someone who could negotiate, collaborate, and work with people in a way that would definitely be productive."

-Susan Borg and Richard Nessen, Lincoln

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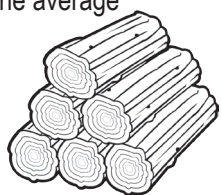
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