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\$52,000 raised for Lorain County Beekeepers Association HQ

Jason Hawk *The Chronicle-Telegram*

4-5 minutes

WELLINGTON — The buzz around town is that the Lorain County Beekeepers Association has a new hive in mind.

Its members have raised \$52,000 toward construction of a headquarters to serve as a classroom, meeting space and apiary.

“We’ve got some steam and momentum, and it’s really starting to show itself,” Building Fund Director Sheila St. Clair said.

There’s more than honey at stake when it comes to the bee population.

According to the Ohio Department of Agriculture, the number of bee colonies across the state has plummeted in the last three decades, from around 300,000 to 50,000.

Habitat loss, pesticides, the spread of parasites, climate change, disease and loss of food sources have devastated the bee population.

One in four bee species are at risk of extinction, according to The Bee Conservancy, a nonprofit formed in 2009 in response to the insects’ mass disappearance. More than half of North America’s

4,000 native bee species are in decline.

Lorain County is at the top of the list of productive, beneficial hives in Ohio, said St. Clair, owner of the for-profit Queen Right Colonies in Spencer.

While her business is thriving, too many bee colonies elsewhere are collapsing, she said.

“We’ve done a good job of turning bee losses around,” St. Clair said, crediting the educational efforts of the Lorain County Beekeepers Association.

As of the end of 2021, the state had 9,879 apiaries registered, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

It said those bees produced more than a million pounds of honey, averaging 64 pounds per colony.

But far more importantly, St. Clair said, bees pollinate other plants, which is important for flowers and crops.

Wellington is an epicenter of beekeeper activity, largely because of the association’s efforts at the Lorain County Fair. Two years ago, it started a pollinator garden at the fairgrounds, and sunflowers have done well there.

Wellington was also named a Bee City USA in 2020, one of just 162 communities across the nation to earn the designation. The title recognizes efforts to conserve native pollinators by providing them with a habitat that is rich in native plants while protecting bees from pesticides.

St. Clair said her preference would be to build a headquarters at the fairgrounds. LCBA Trustee Randy Leiby said the association has not yet approached the fair board with a proposal to do so,

opting instead to start with fundraising.

He said the Wellington Eagles have been big contributors so far, while St. Clair said Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 6941 just gave \$500 and the Lorain-Medina Rural Electric Cooperative recently awarded a \$3,500 grant.

St. Clair said she'd be open to negotiating naming rights with a company willing to contribute a large amount toward the \$100,000 goal.

The goal, she said, is to have a modern building to carry on the legacy of the people who founded the Lorain County Beekeepers Association in 1919.

"It's not just a private beekeepers' vision we have, it's a community," she said. "The people who started this a century ago are gone, but their vision isn't. ... Someday we'll be gone, too, but we want to leave something behind. It's important."

For information on membership and donations, visit loraincountybeekeepers.org.

Members of the association will be available to answer questions on all things bees during the Lorain County Fair, which runs Aug. 21-28. They can be found in Building 27 on the east side of the fairgrounds.

They'll return to the fairgrounds on Sept. 24, for the annual End of Summer Classic. From 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., there will be activities, crafters, vendors, food, games and raffles.

Susan Cobey, an authority in the field of instrumental insemination of honey bees, will speak at 10:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. Kim Flottum, past editor of Bee Culture Magazine and author of many books,

will speak at 12:30 p.m.

Admission to the event is \$5 for adults and free for kids ages 13 and younger.

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