

To Bee or Not to Bee?

Meet the people who make up the Eastern Shore Beekeeper's Guild.

by Laura Emery, Field Editor

At last spring's meeting of the Beekeeper's Guild of the Eastern Shore (BGES), the question might have been asked, "To bee or not to bee?"

"Most of the meeting attendees are experienced or novice beekeepers, but the public is very welcome to attend," says the guild's soft-spoken then-president Ann Snyder (current president is George Brown).

A quick glance around the room reveals apiarists from all walks of life. "The membership of the guild is very diverse; it includes professional scientists and amateur hobbyists, retirees, children, farmers, watermen, government workers — pretty much a cross section of the Shore's population," explains Snyder. What unites this group of Eastern Shore residents — from as far north as Sanford and as far south as Picketts Harbor — is an affinity for and appreciation of honeybees, honey and the hive life.

For BGES member and backyard beekeeper Donna Fauber of Oyster, it's all about the bees. On weekends, you'll most likely find Fauber surrounded by hundreds of thousands of buzzing honeybees. "I just love them," she says. "And I don't really like honey that much."

The cost of beekeeping isn't low. In fact, the numbers can sting, although there are many ways to economize. "It adds up," says Fauber sheepishly, laughing. "I'd tell you how much it costs, but then my husband might read it."

It's safe to say that he's noticed the costs now that her hobby has held strong over the last six years with her managing anywhere from eight to 25 colonies. Fauber uses her "honey money" to help pay for her hobby. "My husband slings the honey for me (extracts it) and we put it in the front yard in a cooler for people to buy on their honor. That's how I support my habit," she explains.

In a group where bee puns shamelessly



JUDY ILLMENSEE PHOTO

A frame covered with bees. The queen bee is among them. Can you spot her? Her abdomen is long and not as marked by black stripes as the rest of the bees.

about, Hacksneck's Sandy Sterling would be considered a "newbee" to backyard beekeeping. Sterling, who just purchased her first hive, took the annual class hosted by the guild. "It was a great class and it was very informative. There were a lot of people there, around 40. They gave us a lot of information. I had no idea there was so much to learn. Beekeeping has a great future on the Eastern Shore," she says.

Sterling is no stranger to honeybees. "I grew up around them. My neighbor used to keep them, so I always had an interest in them. Plus, they're dying off, so we have to do something to keep the bees alive. Our ecosystem depends on it," she says.

Breathtaking blooms beginning to burst at the first sign of fair temperatures also bring backyards abuzz with the most proficient of pollinators, honeybees. Colorful flowers — like forsythia, daffodils and camellia — begin to dot the Eastern Shore's landscape. It's an apiarist's favorite time of the year. "No beekeeper can fail to be warmed by the thrilling blush of early flowering woodland maple trees. They signal the start of the 'nectar flow' of spring and the emergence of the bees," says Snyder.

But the life of a beekeeper isn't all sunshine and honey. "We definitely have

JUDY ILLMENSEE PHOTO



Left: Some of the group's beekeepers met at the farm of W. T. Wilkins in Eastville for an "open hive experience" to show the new beekeepers from the recent Beginning Beekeeping class practical and safe ways of looking into a hive, and what to look for while you're there in order to assess the status of the colony of honey bees. Right: For BGES member and backyard beekeeper Donna Fauber of Oyster, it's all about the bees.

LAURA EMERY PHOTO



challenges,” says Fauber. In recent years, adult honeybees have begun to disappear suddenly and without explanation; this phenomenon is known as absconding. The entire colony simply disappears — no warning, no dead bees. They just leave, and they leave the honey behind. This shouldn’t be confused with swarming; swarming is a challenge, but not a “bad” challenge. A swarm is when the queen and most of the colony workforce leave to set up a new colony and immature bees remain behind to rebuild the hive. Swarming is natural! The Eastern Shore’s beloved bees are not exempt from the phenomenon of absconding or colony collapse disorder. Fauber says she hasn’t experienced this in her own hives, but she’s keeping her bee-stung fingers crossed. “I’ve known of other beekeepers who have lost hives — and it’s not fun.”

Snyder’s take on the situation: “I suppose that once you’ve experienced this tragedy you’re entitled to be called a real beekeeper. Loss happens. It’s an inevitable part of beekeeping today.”

Outside of colony collapse, mites are a beekeeper’s next-worst nightmare. Varroa destructor is an external parasitic mite that attacks the honeybees. “They kind of look like ticks,” explains Fauber. “They can be seen with the naked eye and they’re definitely something you worry about as a beekeeper.” Mite-infested colonies die within a year or two if the beekeeper does not take action against the mites.

“Varroa is present in virtually every hive in the world. The parasitic mites do weaken individual bees with their fluid-sucking bites; however, the chief threat is from the diseases they transmit, such as

the deformed wing virus. Bees with these crumpled wings will never fly, and when too many workers have it, the hive cannot survive. Many beekeepers fight this by using chemicals — a risky proposition because if it’s effective against mites, it probably is harmful to the bees also, much like drugs in humans,” explains Snyder.

For Fauber and others, combating mites doesn’t involve the use of chemicals. The non-chemical treatment is to divide a hive, producing an artificial swarm that interrupts the brood cycle of the mites. But, as any beekeeper will tell you, there is no absolute right way to do anything when it comes to beekeeping. “There’s a great diversity in management styles in our guild, from those who examine hives weekly to those who leave the bees to take care of themselves; from those who eschew chemicals to those who embrace chemical treatments without hesitation; from those who leave honey in the hive for bees, to those who turn bee products into income,” Snyder explains.

But, for some, the honey makes it all worth it. Experienced beekeeper Matt Cormons of Accomac says, “I love beekeeping because the honey is wonderful. You can’t buy honey in a store like you can get from real hives. And my bees make exceptional honey.”

Cormons, who has been an apiarist since 1973, has been a guest speaker at several BGES meetings — sometimes discussing his love of honeybees, and other times sharing environmental concerns. “Many municipalities around the country are cutting all the flowers down with low roadside mowing and I’ve wanted to address that,” he says.



COURTESY OF A&N ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

A&N Electric Cooperative manages its distribution and transmission rights-of-way using selective herbicides. The cooperative targets the scattered, tall-growing tree species, but leaves the native grasses and wildflowers for pollinators and wildlife food and cover.

Twice each year, local roadsides are mowed, destroying an important food source for his favorite pollinators. “It is imperative we encourage all pollinators by keeping their numbers strong throughout the growing season. I feel strongly that our roadside flowers that grow wild are the key to their success. I get worked up about these things and when I get worked up, you can tell I’m Italian,” he says, laughing.

At the end of the day, Cormons loves what he does. “It’s a great pleasure working with the honeybees because they’re unpredictable. You never know what’s going to happen next, and I learn something new everytime I open the hive.”

There is no other place Cormons and his fellow bee-lovers — Fauber, Snyder and Sterling — would rather “bee.”

For More Information

Beekeeper’s Guild of the Eastern Shore
Current President: George Brown
www.bgesva.org



JUDY ILLMENSEE PHOTOS

Above: The bees have built “burr comb” above the frames. They are wanting more space for their brood or their honey, so the beekeeper will likely consider adding another box of frames on the top or rearranging things for them. Left: A drone (male) bee. Note the super-large eyes. These honeybees are larger and fatter than the others and don’t sting.

BGES Beginner Beekeeping Class

For a fee of \$20, class participants get information on how to get started with honeybees, as well as take home a comprehensive handbook, catalogs from bee supply companies, information about bee life and habitat, beekeeping equipment, hive management, pests and harvesting honey. This two-day class will provide a beginning beekeeper with all the knowledge to be successful the first year and beyond.

When:

Saturday, March 10 & 17, 2018, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Where:

Eastern Shore Agricultural Research and Extension Center
33446 Research Drive
Painter, VA 23420



New electric supply surcharge rate to take effect this year

Effective Jan. 1, 2018, A&N Electric Cooperative members will be affected by a wholesale power cost adjustment. This adjustment will increase the price of electricity consumed by our cooperative members and can be seen on a member's electricity bill through the electricity supply service surcharge line item.

Members received a notice of the surcharge increase on their January bills.

On average, a residential member using 1,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per month will see an increase of \$5.07 per month.

The percentage of the cost increase is based on total usage. For example, a residential member who paid \$92.14 in 2017 for 750 kWh will now pay \$95.94, an increase of 4.12 percent or \$3.80, while a residential member who paid \$166.95 in 2017 for 1,500 kWh will now pay \$174.55, an increase of 4.55 percent or \$7.60.

A&N Electric Cooperative is committed to educating our members on how to use electricity efficiently. For energy-saving tips, please visit www.anec.com/content/energy-savings-tips-around-house or follow us on social media for daily tips.

A&N Electric Cooperative is a one-eleventh owner of our wholesale power provider, Old Dominion Electric Cooperative (ODEC). ODEC's power-supply resources are a combination of self-generated power and a portfolio of power-purchase contracts.

A&N ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

21275 Cooperative Way
P.O. Box 290
Tasley, VA 23441-0290
757-787-9750 • 800-431-2632

Office Hours: M-F, 7:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
www.anec.com

Payments: 1-855-386-9921

President & CEO
Butch Williamson

Local Pages Editor
Jay Diem

A&N Electric Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

A&N Electric Cooperative proposes rate adjustment

A&N Electric Cooperative (ANEC) filed an application with the State Corporation Commission (SCC) in late January to adjust its rates effective in October 2018. ANEC is not-for-profit, and is committed to providing reliable power and quality member service at the lowest possible price.

The cooperative routinely replaces aging poles, transformers and other equipment reaching the end of their expected lives. ANEC also makes routine upgrades to its substations to meet the expected reliability standards of our members. Historically, the cost of this equipment has risen while ANEC's rates have remained the same.

The cooperative's two most recent rate cases occurred in 2012 and 1990. In 2012 the cooperative's rates were adjusted in an effort to equalize the different rate structures between legacy co-op members and former Delmarva Power customers after the Delmarva Power territory acquisition.

Recent overall mild winters and summers, an increase in the number of energy-efficient appliances and better energy-efficiency practices have resulted in declining kWh sales. The cost of maintaining ANEC's system without corresponding growth in kWh sales is also a reason for this proposed rate increase. The increase will also help the cooperative's future financial stability.

A portion of the proposed rate case includes a modest increase in the monthly delivery charge. All utilities impose a flat monthly basic customer charge, as approved by the Commission, designed to recover certain fixed expenses associated with making utility service available to your location. The cooperative incurs these expenses regardless of how much energy you consume.

The State Corporation Commission must approve any changes to ANEC's rates. The SCC staff and commissioners will thoroughly review and evaluate the cooperative's rate application.

Any proposed changes are not expected to take effect for nearly 10 months. Over the next several months, the cooperative will provide its members with additional details about the proposed rate change and provide updates on the SCC's review schedule through *Cooperative Living* magazine and on the website at www.anec.com.

A&N Electric Cooperative members can submit questions about the rate change to the cooperative on its rates page (www.anec.com/content/rate-case) or can call 757-787-9750 for more information.

VMDAEC scholarship applications are due Feb. 9th



Any high school or home-school senior graduating in 2018 whose parents or guardians are members of A&N Electric Cooperative and whose primary residence is served by the cooperative is eligible for a \$1,000 scholarship. For the online application

and instructions, visit www.vmdaec.com or www.co-opliving.com/community/scholarship. **The deadline to apply is Friday, Feb. 9, 2018.**



Youth Tour essay deadline is Feb. 16th

The annual essay contest to determine A&N Electric Cooperative's Washington Youth Tour participants ends this month. The contest is open to all high school and home-school juniors living in the cooperative's service area. A student from each area high school will be selected to attend the Youth Tour during a five-day trip to Washington, D.C. **The deadline for essay entrants is Feb. 16, 2018.**

For more information about the Youth Tour Program, visit www.youthtour.coop. To learn more about how you can participate in ANEC's Washington Youth Tour program, speak with your high school's guidance office or contact ANEC Youth Tour Coordinator Patsy Goard at 757-787-9750, ext. 322. Visit our website to learn about last year's Youth Tour experience at www.anec.com/content/youth-tour.

MESSAGES FROM YOUR CO-OP

- ▶ Visit us at www.facebook.com/ANElectricCoop and "like" us.
- ▶ Visit www.anec.com to sign up to receive Beat the Peak emails or text-message alerts.
- ▶ The Touchstone Energy® Co-op Connections® Card is FREE to all ANEC members. The card offers discounts at participating local and nationwide businesses, including prescription drug discounts.



Helping us Beat the Peak can help lower your electricity costs

Beat the Peak is a voluntary program that encourages A&N Electric Cooperative members to conserve or limit energy usage during peak times. Your cooperative pays a monthly demand charge based on the peak hourly usage during the month. This accounts for a large percentage of the cost of electricity for our members. By cutting back on the amount of wholesale power purchased during these peak periods, A&N Electric Cooperative can reduce its total wholesale power costs. This will help hold down the cost for our members.

Peak periods occur when the demand for electricity is the highest. Usually, these are periods when it is very cold or hot outside. During this time, members are asked to use energy wisely and follow these guidelines:

- In winter, lower the thermostat by 3-4 degrees.
- Postpone the use of major appliances, such as clothes washers, dryers and dishwashers.
- Delay using hot water during peak periods.
- Turn off all unnecessary lights.



We can alert co-op members directly of the "Beat the Peak" period by email and/or text message. Included in the message will be the anticipated day and time of the peak period. It is important that you reduce energy consumption during this critical period. Notices will also be posted to the A&N Electric Cooperative website, Facebook page and Twitter feed. The alerts will also be announced on local radio stations WESR 103.3, CTG 96.5 and HOT COUNTRY 99.3.

Join A&N's "Beat the Peak" program today and help control your Cooperative's cost of wholesale power and help save energy resources.

When you sign up, you will receive an email and/or text message notifying you of an approaching "Peak Period" or time when we are purchasing wholesale power at the highest prices. Your help in conserving energy during these "peak" periods reduce our energy costs and ultimately your energy costs.

Want to start receiving "Beat the Peak" alerts? Fill out the form found here at www.anec.com/content/beat-peak.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Consider insulating your hot water pipes. Doing so can reduce heat loss, allow you to lower the temperature setting and save an additional 3 to 4 percent per year on water heating.

Source: energy.gov

