

Sebastian River Area

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Friendly Beekeepers Take Sting Out Of Inspector's Hard Work

By LEIGH GLENN
Press-Journal Staff Writer

For Jerry Crews, bees amount to more than a heap of stings and a barrel of honey.

The black and gold striped abdomens and tawny velvet thoraxes long have been this North Florida boy's livelihood.

Crews is a beekeeper-turned-bee inspector, responsible for registering all hives and protecting the beekeeping industry from parasites, diseases and unwanted species of bees.

Crews' job brought him from Nassau County to Indian River County six years ago.

As one of 16 state inspectors in Florida, his daily routine includes trekking to the far reaches of Indian River, Osceola and Brevard counties, chatting with beekeepers and checking hives for parasites and diseases.

In this county alone, 31 beekeepers have about 5,500 hives. Crews and two others can inspect 300 hives a day.

In Search Of Mites

Aside from the beekeepers themselves, Crews is the front line in bee defense and essentially, honey production. He pours over hives searching for foul brood, a sporous bacteria that kills the young before they develop into bees, and varroa mites, bodily fluid-sucking insects that can drink up a bee colony in as little as six months.

"Once we find foul brood, state law requires that colony to be burned," Crews said.

The mites are treated with plastic pesticide strips. But in both cases, apiaries are quarantined for 30 days and cannot be moved.

"That really regulates the migratory beekeeper more than the hobbyists, because the hobbyists don't move around," Crews said. "We certify that we have checked for foul brood and that they can be moved to another state."

On a recent rainy Tuesday, Crews stops by Lamar and Cornelia Carlton's house in mid-Indian River County to check on their queen bees. The Carltons are lifelong beekeepers and the conversation, over mugs of coffee, turns



Press-Journal staff photo by Leigh Glenn

Cornelia Carlton opens a queen honey bee hive for bee inspector Jerry Crews.

to livelihoods — how it's become difficult in recent years to make a living on honey production.

Prices have dropped from more than 68 cents per pound in 1985 to 40 cents per pound today while the cost of a hive box is \$10 and plastic mite strips are \$1.50 each.

The problem, everyone agrees, is foreign honey imports, mainly those from China. Following an investigation, the Federal Trade Commission said China was "dumping" its honey on the U.S. market — honey that is not allowed to "ripen," and instead is adulterated with corn syrup, the Carltons and fellow beekeeper Ed Jones said.

Business troubles or lack of good pollen sources because of citrus freezes are something Crews relates to. He kept bees for 11 years before becoming an inspector. He left for the security of a better job.

"I was working another job, too, and doing the bees on the side," he said. "I figured it was time to get something a little more sound."

So, Crews stopped being regulated and became a regulator — a move that has made him thoughtful of the people he inspects.

Ups And Downs

Florida stepped up bee hive regulations in the mid-1980s with the onslaught of parasites. Since

then, the industry has become depressed. That makes for a lousy combination and Crews sometimes finds himself stuck in the middle. For example, most beekeepers protect their hives from foul brood without being told to do so. But that all depends on money.

"It might not be because he neglected them, but because financially, he couldn't take care of it," Crews said. "I'm hearing it from both sides: 'I can't take care of them.' 'What are you going to do about it?'"

Despite that, Crews enjoys his job.

"You get to meet different personalities," he said. "You get to hear different beekeeping techniques. (With true beekeepers,) it's like a personal visit. The problems don't exist in these bees. That's their livelihood. If they have a problem, they don't hesitate to call me."

And call him they do, even as late as 1:30 a.m. to set a next-day inspection. The Indian River County Sheriff's Department called once, too, late at night, to get Crews to spray a nest of yellow jackets. The thin-abdomened insects were coming through the drywall of a Gifford house.

Bee inspectors also must check bait hives at Port Canaveral every three weeks, checking for swarms of stowaway African bees transported on ships.

"Say we do catch a swarm, we gas it off to depopulate it," Crews said. Samples are sent to labs and checked for strains of the African bee.

"If they turn up positive, then we've caught the swarm before it escapes into the general public," he said.

But if a swarm appears to have left a bait hive, inspectors walk the port to try to catch the swarm.

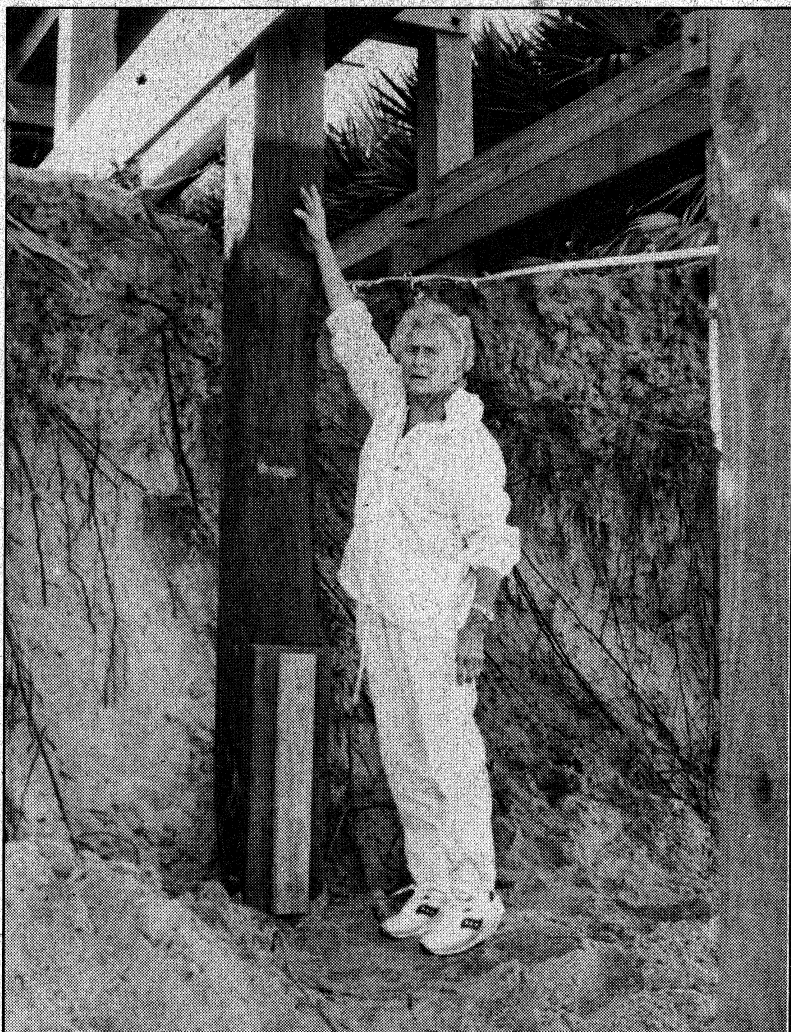
Although African bees already have made their way into Texas, they have not been found in Florida. Crews doesn't know what sort of impact such bees could have on Florida's beekeeping industry.

"We're hoping they don't get here, to be honest with you," he said. "We haven't had to deal with them yet. We're watching (other states) and adopting programs."

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1995 May Bring More Erosion



Press-Journal staff photo by Leigh Glenn

Sea Oaks resident Rachel Rand points to the old sand line under the dune crossover in front of the development.

By LEIGH GLENN
Press-Journal Staff Writer

When Rachel Rand wakes up in the middle of the night, she can hear the Atlantic Ocean pounding the beach near her Sea Oaks condominium.

Although her unit doesn't face the water, she wonders if the waves will someday reach her building.

"It's getting worse," Rand said of the erosion — which has increased since October.

Rand and her neighbors, Dr. Larry Stevens and his wife Pat, say that when the water rolls in at high tide, the beach disappears.

"We're all very alarmed about it and nobody does anything," Mrs. Stevens said.

Earlier this month, the state Department of Environmental Protection ordered the Sebastian Inlet Tax District to replace sand bypassed to downdrift beaches since 1986. But the district is appealing the ruling.

Above-average tides expected around New Year's Day have beachfront homeowners nervous. As an emergency measure, the DEP gave 15 property owners living north of Wabasso between Nov. 29 and Dec. 16 to put up to one foot of sand along the dune in front of their houses. All took advantage of the chance, Paden Woodruff, a senior engineer in charge of the DEP's special projects bureau of beaches and coastal systems, said.

Woodruff admits the measure is only a temporary fix for homeowners. "They're going to have to look at long-term solutions and

come up with a plan and assume responsibility to protect their property," Woodruff said. "We're here to help them and guide them and assist them in any way we can."

To the north of Wabasso Beach Park, Bill Glynn and his neighbors were among those who brought in sand a few weeks ago.

"We just put approximately 4,000 cubic yards of sand on our dune and our beach at our own expense," said Glynn, president of the Summerplace Homeowners Association.

As for action, there is no easy solution and any solution likely will be expensive, said Dr. Thomas Longworth, chairman of the Sea Oaks Beach Committee.

"The whole beach has to be done," he said. "How you do that I don't know yet."

"It's going to cost money," Longworth said. "It's worth it in the long run, otherwise we're going to lose tourism and taxes from the barrier island."

The Sea Oaks portion of the beach normally loses about 1½ to 2 feet of sand a year. In the last six months, however, six feet has been lost, taking cabbage palms and palmettos with it, he said.

Although the county and the state have not stepped in to help beachfront residents, Indian River County Commissioner Fran Adams agrees something must be done. She does not understand the "anorexic" approach of placing sand on the downdrift beaches only every three or four years. It does not allow time for the beaches to build up, she said.