

May 18, 2016

URBAN BEEKEEPING

# CREATING A BUZZ



John Dixon/The News-Gazette

**ABOVE:** Maggie Wachter, right, and Allen Strong ride a lift last week to the top of some shipping containers near Silvercreek Restaurant in Urbana. Strong owns the restaurant, and Wachter is a local beekeeper who is placing bees near gardens and trees in order to pollinate the restaurant's gardens and produce honey. **TOP:** Wachter's smoke pot, shown at the Courier Cafe in Urbana, is used to calm the bees.

## 2 local restaurants install hives for garden pollination, honey production

By **PAUL WOOD**  
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URBANA — Two new hives of bees are now buzzing atop the Courier Cafe roof and doing local gardeners the service of pollinating flowers and



**At news-gazette.com**  
**VIDEO:** Videographer John Dixon documents the action as bee hives are placed atop the Courier Cafe in Urbana

morning last week atop the cafe at 111 N Race owner Allen Strong, who also owns Silvercreek.

them, but they're nice bees, Wachter hastens to add. And not just because they pollinate and make honey. They're genuinely good-natured bees, says the master beekeeper. "They're mutts," she

# BEES

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And they'll tend to stick around the Courier area.

"Bees come home like chickens to roost," Wachter says. "They fly into the hive at sunset."

Before she started saving endangered bees, Wachter served a two-decade career with the United Nations in Geneva.

Wachter studied beekeeping at the University of Florida Extension over three years, as well as earned a master's degree in social work last year at the University of Illinois.

She said bees are very therapeutic.

But Wachter started out afraid of the insects, despite her admiration for their environmental work.

After being given a hive, she decided to become a master beekeeper.

"I was terrified of the hive the first year," she says.

"I realized I had to get over that fear. Bees can smell fear; they can smell (stress hormone) cortisol changes in skin."

She has taught at Parkland about five years; she has been a beekeeper since 2009.

"My classes range on all kinds of subjects relating to bees from beekeeping to mead-making," she says of the honey-based drink.

"It's not true that those who teach can't do."

Wachter says people have come to realize how important bees are in agriculture and in the ecosystem in general.

"The number of bees is declining, and there's a movement to help them by providing foraging areas that still have flowers," she says. "In Illinois, that's a real problem with monoculture — corn and beans are everywhere. The urban areas are still good because of gardens. Chicago has hives on city hall."

Wachter says "a lot of great chefs have hives on top of their restaurants. It's the best way to be sure

*"Bees come home like chickens to roost. They fly into the hive at sunset."*

## MAGGIE WACHTER

of Urbana, a Parkland instructor and beekeeper

of the quality of your honey; on the honey market, with prices so high, people are adulterating it with things like high-fructose corn syrup."

Putting the hives atop the Courier was the idea of owner Allen Strong.

"He's doing this because he's interested in supporting the environment; he has garden beds around the cafe, in the farm-to-table movement," she says.

Wachter applied for a two-year USDA Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program grant, which she works in partnership with Rachel Coventry, the beekeeper at her family's Curtis Orchard.

"We learned a lot about how to pollinate apples on a small farm," Wachter says.

The grant is expressly to research bees on small farms.

Wachter says farmers rely on bees for many crops, including oranges, almonds and blueberries. They're moved around to different sites.

"It's very stressful for bees; transporting them from one state to another is very hard on the bees," she says. "Instead, small farms with a diversity of crops can use the bees for pollination."

Wachter says Strong's restaurants are ideal habitats.

"The Courier and Silvercreek area has black locusts about to bloom," she says. "We'll get black locust honey; it has a wonderful flavor."

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