

ALL ABUZZ in the Hive

Story & Photos by Danielle Moroux

Jean Vasicek turned her curiosity of bees into a local, organic honey harvest year-round.



What has five eyes, lives only 35 days and produces the perfect food? Bees, of course. Worker bees fly 55,000 miles and tap 2 million flowers just to make 1 pound of honey. Bees are the strongest link in the food chain contributing millions of dollars to our economy each year. Without bees, roughly half of all produce would not be available to the public. And they manufacture honey, which can help alleviate illnesses from allergies to eczema.

Jean Vasicek, beekeeper and owner of **Winter Park Honey**, has a passion for working with bees. She began her quest for honey by accident. Her brother, who lived in Tulsa, Okla., became fascinated

with bees and thought that his sister might be just as interested. "Just like asking if I wanted ice cream for dessert, my brother asked if I would like a hive. I said sure," Vasicek says.

The hive sat in the backyard for six years. Vasicek was only curious about bees at first, and then decided that the honey might be a good thing to eat. At the time, she was terrified of the flying stingers, so she contacted a local bee harvester and began her immersion into the care of bees.

Vasicek's earlier career as a physicist working on the space shuttle program and other aerospace projects prepared her for a new career in beekeeping. Her extraction methods produce organic honey with the least amount of stress to the bees. The honey is harvested by hand, using a fork to break open the caps on each wax cone frame. She makes sure that the bees don't have to build the cone every time by leaving most of the wax for them.

To capture the flavor of the honey, Vasicek minimizes contact with air by bottling it straight from the comb. No heat is used in the extraction process, which keeps the integrity of the honey. "Everything you do with honey changes the flavor," she says. "The less you do with it, the better the flavor and higher con-

centration of nutrients."

Honey contains many nutrients that help build a strong immune system. Eating local honey helps with controlling allergies by boosting tolerance to local pollens.

Vasicek works as hard as her bees do. She's up at 7 a.m. every day, tending to her workers. To her, each harvest is like a fine wine. From delicate Orange Blossom and Wildflower to Vasicek's special dark rich autumn varieties, such as Fall Jubilee and Autumn Gold, each flavor is unique.

According to Vasicek, the richness and flavor of the honey is dependent upon the flora at that time of year. Living in Florida means she can harvest all year long. The best variety, however, might be Vasicek's Blackberry Twist. It's won first and second place in a number of competitions, including the Welch contest.

Vasicek's best kept secret is the locations of the apiaries, which consist of more than 100 hives spread throughout Central Florida with approximately 15 hives in each location. She loves to search online for aerial views of possible new locations to give her bees a diverse environment of plant life and areas where no pesticides are sprayed. She lives by a particular beekeeper philosophy: "stress free bees, healthy honey and happy patrons." ■

Jean Vasicek harvests honey all year long at more than 100 hives across Central Florida.



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Go to www.CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com to learn more about the benefits of local honey.