

A Brief History of the Origins of the Treasure Valley Beekeepers Club

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In a recent conversation with Jeff Bergland, the current president of the Treasure Valley Beekeepers Club (TVBC), he and I were discussing some details about just how the club came into existence, back in 2008. I gave him a sort of brief over-view of what the state beekeepers association (the Idaho Honey Industry Association -- "IHIA") had done to include a special session for so-called "hobbyists" beekeepers when we began to plan for our 2007 state conference.

My association with the IHIA all started back in 2006. I had decided to attend the Northwest Beekeepers Conference meeting in Newport, Oregon in the fall of 2006. I attended the conference as a "side-liner"--basically a hobbyist whose hobby has grown to the point where he has more honey coming in than can conveniently be consumed by friends and family! I didn't really know very many of the Idaho beekeepers, so when the general session broke up so each state could meet on their own, I sought out the Idaho group. I knew Nick Noyes already, along with a couple of the others, and he introduced me to the ones I didn't know. The upshot of this meeting was that they asked me if I would become the Secretary/Treasurer of the IHIA for 2007. They told me they only had "one meeting a year, and all I would have to do is take minutes and send them out to the members". How hard could that be? Well, at a meeting we had at Mike Cooper's offices at the Idaho Department of Agriculture, it was decided that since we hadn't had our own state conference for several years, we would put one together for the fall of 2007. At the time, no one had any idea of how many hobbyists were out there, and of the ones we could somehow manage to contact, how many would actually attend. The IHIA executive committee had the job of actually planning and organizing our conference. At that time it consisted of the following: Greg Lamonds, our President; myself, the Secretary/Treasurer; Nick Noyes, our Vice-President; Tom Hamilton and Randy Johnson, both long-time local commercial beekeepers, who were instrumental in setting the agenda for the conference as well as personally contacting various prominent authorities on beekeeping whom they could invite to participate in the conference. I felt very fortunate to be able to work with and get to know some of the most knowledgeable, professional

beekeepers in the entire state. From the beginning, our executive committee thought it was a good idea to reach out to any hobbyists who might want to attend. The general feeling was that hobbyists perform a valuable public service insofar as putting a very positive face on honey bees and beekeeping that many people know very little about and who may frankly be very afraid of. By such things as manning an information booth at the State Fair, or collecting swarms from people who may be deathly afraid of bees, or by going out into the community and teaching kids or young people about the importance of bees to our food chain hobbyists can be helpful in ways that most commercial beekeepers could never be. Besides, in order to keep our industry alive, we depend in a steady supply of new beekeepers to maybe move from the hobby stage to become side-liners, or even full fledged commercial beekeepers themselves. We share a lot of common goals and interests and it benefits all of us if the community has a thriving bee club out there whose members can meet the public and by interacting with them, help educate and enlighten them about what bees do, and why they are so important to all of us. Everyone on the committee was dedicated to organizing the very best, most informative, as well as the most entertaining conference we could possibly put together. Though Greg Lamonds couldn't always attend the planning sessions, he gave his full support to whatever the executive committee came up with. Nick Noyes, Tom Hamilton, and Randy Johnson divided up the job of contacting prospective presenters, Nick agreed to contact possible vendors who might want to set up displays of their wares, and I was charged with locating a suitable site for the conference. I was able to reserve the conference rooms at the AmeriTel Hotel, near the Towne Square Mall for the 7th and 8th of December. That particular room would be large enough (or so we thought!) to hold the 60 to 80 people we expected for the conference. The hotel could then pull a divider across the room on Saturday morning to make a separate room for the IHIA Business Meeting, as well as room for however many hobbyists showed up.

Besides arranging for the hotel (and a million other details I never even imagined!), I also needed a program for the hobbyist session on Saturday morning. I had been a school teacher most of my working life, and I thought some sort of "bee school" would be a good draw for anyone already into bees, or who was thinking of taking up the hobby. I was talking to a beekeeper friend from Weiser, Nordelle Terry, about what I had been thinking, and she suggested I contact Tom Trusewicz, from Astoria, Oregon. Tom had done a Bee School at the fall, 2006 conference at Newport, and Nordelle thought that he could probably give me some pointers as to

how to organize our school. I did call him, and I simply asked him what topics I would need to include, and in general, how much in depth should I go in the discussion. He let me finish with my questions, then simply said “If you can get me a round trip ticket from Portland to Boise, I’ll come over and do my Bee School for you!” What a deal! Man, did he make my job a lot easier! Thank you Tom, and thank you Nordelle for suggesting Tom!

Well, to make a rather longer story shorter, we had our conference, and it was great. We had some terrific speakers including Randy Oliver and Pat Heitkam from California; Jerry Bromenshenk and David Wick from Montana; George Hanson and Thom Trusewicz from Oregon; Dick Molenda, from Western Bee Supply in Montana, and Lee Heine from the National Honey Board. We had a really nice banquet and Dick Molenda and Jay Miller from Blackfoot did a bang-up job running our auction that Friday night. We really wanted to “hit a homerun!” with this conference so that it would become a tool for outreach to all the beekeepers in the state, and would help make the IHIA a fun and worthwhile group people would want to be part of. And, it would set the stage for an even better conference in 2008. The general sessions were done by Friday afternoon, the banquet/auction was a big hit on Friday evening, and all that remained was the Business Meeting and the Bee School, both set for Saturday morning.

Nick and I were discussing our prospects for the Bee School on Friday evening when Tom Trusewicz arrived from Oregon. We thanked him for making the trip over (it had been snowing a very heavy, wet snow all day Friday, and it was pretty messy outside). We showed him the room he would have for the Bee School, and we expressed our hope that at least 12 or 15 hobbyists would attend. Nick and I had gathered little “door prizes” to be given out to attendees, based on their numbered seat in the room. All seats were numbered ahead of time, and a corresponding number was placed in a bowl to be drawn every hour (or whenever they took a break!) We were sure we had more than enough prizes to cover any who showed up. When it came time for Tom to start, Nick and I introduced him to the 15 or so people in the room, and thanked them all for coming. We explained the little door prize give-away, then we left to go next door to conduct our Business Meeting.

About an hour and a half into our Business Meeting (I had to take notes to record the Minutes), Phil Puckett, a commercial beekeeper from Kamiah got up and stepped outside. He came back a few minutes later and rather excitedly announced to our group: “There are 37 people in that Bee

School next door!” We had to see this for ourselves, so we called a break, and several of us went next door. It was amazing! Where the heck had all these people come from? We had no idea this many were interested in beekeeping, and were willing to brave slick roads and slush to learn more about it. Nick and I helped them do another round of door prizes, and I told the group that with so many interested people in attendance, this would be a perfect opportunity to start a beekeeping club. We went back to finish our Business Meeting, Tom finished his very successful Bee School, and the group of hobbyists agreed to meet again after the Christmas holidays to formalize an actual beekeeping club. (Oh by the way, we had brought just enough door prizes so that every single person in there received something!) What a cool way to wind up a super conference! It had set the stage for a very exciting 2008 for all of us.

I tried to attend several of the club meetings that first year. I don't think I made it to the first ones, but I do remember Rene Woodard was elected the first president, and that by summer we were meeting at Edwards Greenhouse, which very generously allowed us to use their potting room up until they had to close everything up to allow their poinsettias to bloom for Christmas! It sure seems that hobbyists love to get together, share food and beverages, and stories about their beekeeping adventures -- at least the ones in the Boise area do! The IHIA is very proud of the part it played in getting this club going, but it's the club leaders and the members themselves who have turned it into the absolute success it is today. Each year it gets bigger and bigger, and the club continues to expand its role in educating and informing the community about our honey bees and how important it is to protect and preserve these amazing creatures.

The year 2007 was the beginning for the IHIA as we now know it, and for the TVBC too, though they both have grown so much since then. As we began the planning for the 2008 IHIA conference, we all realized there was a growing number of interested people who would love to come together and gain more knowledge about honey bees and their world. Now there was a vibrant, fun club with committed leaders whose members would be excited about attending the conference once again. As we got confirmations from the speakers we invited to the '08 conference, we explained to them that we had a very enthusiastic club that would really love to hear them speak to them following the sessions with the full conference. They were more than glad to meet with the club, and it made for another great conference in December of 2008. This same pattern of continuing success has continued in 2009, 2010, and 2011. By working together, both the IHIA and the

TVBC can ensure that great presenters will be available to share their knowledge and expertise with all of us.

A final thought regarding the very beneficial relationship between the IHIA and TVBC:

The IHIA does a fantastic job of bringing in truly top notch speakers to the annual conference. These people are acclaimed experts in their area of specialization within beekeeping. They are much sought after throughout the country, and they are very good teachers who know how to present new material in a clear as well as entertaining way. The IHIA tries to bring in a variety of speakers who can address problems in beekeeping from several angles to help us broaden our understanding of what our bees need to be more healthy and productive--for their benefit and for ours. I hope the TVBC can continue to work with the IHIA so that this opportunity to meet and learn from these bee authorities can continue. One issue I see is that the IHIA would like to limit their conference to a Thursday-Friday schedule. This saves many attendees the chance to go home on Friday rather than hold over another night. It also ensures that attendance at the Business Meeting will be good, since probably not many would stay an extra night just to attend a Business Meeting Saturday morning. Once the conference is over on Friday afternoon, many of our presenters are anxious to head home, as well. This means they may leave Boise as early as Friday, rather than spend another night here in order to meet with the hobbyists on Saturday. I don't know if the club would be willing to help defray the expense of having our speakers stay another night here before going home, but it might help ensure having quality speakers available on Saturday. From a strictly business angle, the IHIA does pay the travel and hotel expenses for our speakers, and sometimes they even are asked to provide an honorarium as a sort of "contribution" to the speaker's research projects. It's also worth noting that the actual conference room used for the hobbyist meeting is provided for our use so long as we meet a minimum number of rented rooms during the conference. Again, this hasn't been an issue in the past and perhaps this won't become an issue between the IHIA and the TVBC in the future. I'm glad to see the IHIA inviting a representative of the various clubs to sit in on planning the conference and discussing issues at the Business Meeting. My hope is that both groups continue to grow and prosper for many years to come.