

Matthews claims Bee City USA title

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- Learn more:
 - The Mecklenburg County Beekeepers Association will offer beekeeping classes starting in January; visit www.meckbees.org.
 - Martha Krauss is willing to talk bees with anyone interested in starting a hive; she can be reached at kraussmw@gmail.com.

Matthews has been awarded the Tree City USA certification for 14 consecutive years, and recently was the 64th community in the nation to be designated a certified Community Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation.

Now, by a recent vote of the Matthews Town Board, the town is only the fourth community in the U.S. to claim the Bee City USA designation. The designation means Matthews will work to educate the community on the importance of pollination-friendly environments, install a Bee City USA streetsign, celebrate National Pollination Week and apply annually to renew the designation. In a memo to the Town Board, Town Manager Hazen Blodgett, a beekeeper himself, wrote, "Becoming a Bee City USA is a natural fit for the Town of Matthews. The community is committed to preserving open space and the environment in order to be a great place to live, work and play." Martha Krauss, a member of Habitat and Wildlife Keepers, was the driving force behind the Bee City effort in Matthews. Krauss and her husband, Will, own 803 Elizabeth Bed and Breakfast in Matthews, where they have several hives and serve local honey to guests. Their bee interest started four years ago with beekeeping classes and then a call from a friend. "Lois West was walking her son home from school one day and called and said, 'Will, do you want some bees?'" Martha Krauss said. "She had spotted a swarm on the greenway fence and thought of us. Lois and I collected the bees, put them in a cardboard box, and I brought them home." Martha and Will Krauss since have taken more classes, added hives, purchased additional bee equipment and watched the hives thrive. And they've learned some valuable lessons along the way. "Our bees are very docile. You don't bother them and they won't bother you," Martha Krauss said, "but last spring they turned mean. A bee expert said that they were hungry. There had been a lot of rain and the pollen had been washed away. "You wouldn't believe the change in those bees when we fed them. I think that experience held a greater message about being hungry." Matthews resident Carol Buie Jackson, former president of the N.C. Wildlife Federation and founder of HAWK, said we would all be hungry without bees and other pollinating insects. "Studies show that one in every three bites of food we eat is courtesy of insect pollinators. The Bee City USA designation is saying that, as a town, we recognize the importance and value of bees and other pollinators in the ecosystem and that we will practice gardening methods that are bee friendly," Jackson said. Though she doesn't have hives in her yard, Jackson said, she grows a variety of plants to attract bees and other pollinators. The Krausses grow a variety of plants as well, and have something blooming year-round. Matthews Commissioner John Higdon is also a gardener and beekeeper. "I've always been an avid gardener, and I started keeping bees four years ago to help pollinate the garden better," Higdon said. "It also was something my son Jed and I could do together. He was 13 then, and at that time was one of the

youngest certified beekeepers in North Carolina. He still helps me with them.” Will Krauss said there are hives all over, from the center of Charlotte to the outermost areas of Mecklenburg County. He said he hopes the Bee City designation will make people more aware of the importance of bees and how to encourage and protect them. Meanwhile, he and Martha will continue to enjoy their thousands of insect friends collecting honey once a year, feeding the bees when pollen is scarce and watching the daily activity out their kitchen window. “They bring us joy,” said Martha Krauss. “It sounds silly, but it’s fun to watch them coming and going. They are such an interesting society in how every bee has a job.” And there’s always something to learn. Beekeepers are a very congenial group and are a lot like gardeners. They like to talk about their hobby. Just ask.”

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