

# Deseret News

## Whitby all abuzz over his bees

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For the Deseret News

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To bee or not to bee? That is the question research professor Frank Whitby was faced with last spring.

Fortunately, for those who appreciate library books with a bit of a buzz, Whitby decided that if the city needed an official beekeeper, it might as well be him. That's why you'll now find him most weekends tending to two hives he set up in a rooftop nook last year at Salt Lake City's downtown library.

With spring in full swing, Whitby, who works in the University of Utah's biochemistry department, thought it would be a good time to share a Free Lunch of pasta and garlic bread at Cannella's, then make a beeline to the library's fifth floor to check up on his 30,000-plus tenants.

"Rooftop beehives are popular all over the world," he says, whether they're located atop opera houses and museums in Paris or skyscrapers in New York. "So it occurred to me last year: Why not Salt Lake City?"

When Whitby suggested to his neighbor, Salt Lake City Councilman J.T. Martin, that the city should install a few hives and harvest the honey, Martin did what any politician in a sticky situation would do: He put Whitby in charge.

The backyard beekeeper has been fascinated by honeybees ever since he planted his first garden as a child in Colorado and watched bees harvest the flowers' pollen. "My neighbors had a beehive and I told myself, 'Someday, I'm going to keep bees,'" he says. "It took a few decades, but finally, here I am."

Whitby, who moved to Salt Lake City in 1995, put together his first hive five years ago and set out to learn everything he could about drones, queens and "toil until they drop" worker bees.

"Their lives are short (about 30 days) but very productive," he says as we slip into mesh-covered beekeeper suits to inspect the library hives. "From here, these bees are foraging about two miles out — everywhere from the Temple Square gardens to the university."

He carefully pops the lid off a hive as hundreds of bees swarm around us, trying to stop the invasion. Lifting one of the honeycomb-covered frames, Whitby takes a close look.

"They have plenty of reserves right now — probably five pounds of honey on each frame," he says. "Now that we're getting into the busy season, these stores will go up. This fall, we should have a good harvest of honey."

Last year, Whitby and his Boy Scout troop bottled more than 200 pounds of honey in two flavors: Library Amber and Library Light. "The further you go in the season, the darker the honey," he says. The honey is donated to the city and given out in small samples to library customers who are often not aware of the sweet gig Whitby has going on the fifth floor.

"I'd love to see hives on rooftops all over the city," he says, "but at the same time, I don't want to

make my life more complicated. I enjoy sharing what I know, but if we get more city hives, it would be nice to have some volunteers to help care for them."

Whitby admits his work habits can't come close to those of the average worker bee and he hopes to keep it that way. Thirty days might be a lifetime for a honeybee, he says, but he'd like another 30 years, at least. He grins as he writes down the results of the afternoon's inspection and posts it in the window for the public.

"Dead bees on the patio are normal," reads the last sentence, "albeit dead." Whitby laughs. Yet another bee pun — he's heard them all. "I'd better be careful," he admits, "or people will start expecting too much. We probably don't need people thinking that the city beekeeper has a sense of humor."

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