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He's Making A List

Bubba Hillje, a freshman portraying Santa Claus, asks a child what he wants for Christmas Wednesday at the MSC. Hillje, whose Santa act

was sponsored by Legett Hall, didn't convince the little boy, who ran away. Pictures can be taken with Santa at the MSC until Friday.

Photo by Tracy Sauer

Beekeepers like honey harvest, call shunned insects fascinating

SAN ANGELO (AP) — Two white-suited men wearing helmets and thick gloves advanced warily into a grove of trees. One man carried a power pack on his back; the other held a smoking receptacle. Alien inhabitants whirred and hummed as they sensed the men's presence.

Ghostbusters? Americans visiting another planet? Wrong. Beekeepers Cecil Dickson and his son Andy suited up recently to harvest a "super" of honey from a hive. First, Cecil Dickson allowed the smoke to drift from the tin teapot into the hive to lull the bees.

Andy Dickson removed a golden comb built by the bees in a flat stacked in the hive. The comb was covered with the cranky little insects. Andy Dickson revved up the power pack and aimed a stiff draft of air at the comb.

Buzzing bees formed an unfriendly cloud on the other side of the comb. Gradually the bees dropped to the base of the hive in a black, unnerving swarm.

Andy Dickson worked slowly, blowing both sides of the frame until he had cleared all but a few bees. He cleared three more frames before he finished. The frames, heavy with

honey, were stacked on a dolly and removed to Dickson's spotlessly clean warehouse where he stores and packages the sweet syrup.

Cecil and Andy Dickson have been processing honey in large amounts for about four years. They began as owners of one hive, intrigued with the habits of bees.

"They're fascinating little crea-

tures," said Andy Dickson. "The more you learn, the less you know."

Travis Lane, a trooper with the Department of Public Safety, watched intently as the Dicksons collected the honey. Lane has been keeping bees for 12 years. He is vice president of the Concho Valley Beekeepers Association, a 60-member organization of people who exchange information and advice about beekeeping.

Lane speaks to school classes and interested civic groups about how

bees organize and function to produce and gather honey. He brings along a 35-minute slide presentation filled with pictures of bees at work on the flowers and inside the hive.

But it is not honey that is the special gift of bees to the world. It is their pollination of agricultural and floral crops, Lane said. Half the agri-

Maureen, alternately ignored and puzzled over the hive. During the time, their friend died.

Finally the couple visited the library and researched honey-keeping. They talked to other beekeepers in the area.

The first honey harvest netted Lane three gallons of honey. He brushed the bees off the comb and squeezed the honey from the comb.

"I didn't worry about bee stings. Just getting the honey was exciting. We wouldn't eat nearly as well without bees."

— Travis Lane, beekeeper

The empty combs are returned unharmed, into the hive where the worker bees will clean the combs and prepare them for storing pollen and nectar. The worker bees also choose to use the comb for brood purposes, Lane said.

In the 1850s, L.L. Langstroth invented removable frames for beehive build combs. He discovered that bees need five-sixteenths of an inch space between combs, so his hives with drawers worked well, Lane said.

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