Beekeepers and beekeeping organizations are continually seeking to attract and educate new individuals to beekeeping. Several beekeeping associations have developed outreach projects to youth and young adults. One group Delaware beekeepers are seeking to attract are military service veterans.

The next EAS conference, July 31-Aug 4, 2017 at University of Delaware will feature a presentation on the Delaware Beekeeping project reserved for service veterans entitled Planting Hope with Honey Bees. The Planting Hope project is a joint effort venture between the Delaware Beekeepers Association, University of Delaware Cooperative Extension and the Delaware Departments of Agriculture and Health and Social Services.

Marine Corps veteran Ronnie J. Hazlett II (SHOWN IN PHOTO) of Wilmington was the initial individual selected for the Delaware beekeeping project developed to train beekeeping skills to returning veterans, with the expectation they will pay forward and pass beekeeping interest and nuc colonies along to fellow veterans. As the first recipient, Ronnie got assistance from mentor Ray Walker of Walker Apiaries in Northern Delaware.

With this designation, Ronnie initially established 1 hive and 3 nucs at the Delaware Urban Farm near New Castle. The farm is on the grounds of the Delaware Department of Health and Social Services’ Herman Holloway, Sr. Campus, south of Wilmington. One nuc colony for the project was supplied by the Delaware Beekeepers Association, an anonymous Delaware Beekeeper contributed the full-sized colony and Two Drones Apiary of Lincoln Co, KY (Ron’s homeland) provided funding for two additional nucleus colonies.

Beekeeping equipment was supplied by Brushy Mountain Bee Supply and smoker and hive tools by Mann Lake. Maxant Industries, who take great pride in helping veterans, was a significant benefactor in enabling the program to purchase honey processing items (uncapping tank, bottling tank, extractor, clarifier, wax melter) in the second season.

Faith Kuehn, the environmental program administrator with the Delaware Department of Agriculture (which includes the apiary inspection program), conceived of the Delaware program, after attending a conference by the nonprofit Farmer-Veteran Coalition. Although of different designs, the Delaware and another in West Virginia both veteran programs seek to enable veterans to develop valuable, practical beekeeping skills as they return from military service.

Prior to establishment of the apiary, Faith Kuehn first started injecting a bit of nature in the heart of the Holloway complex, which houses the Delaware Psychiatric Center and DHSS administrative offices, with establishment of a 3,000-square-foot Planting Hope Urban Farm. Now the planting includes production, sensory and community garden areas. She envisioned that the bees would be a natural to the Garden. “Gardening and beekeeping have a very practical aspect, but the actual work itself can be very healing for people going through some tough times” she says.

Hazlett, a native of Lincoln County, Kentucky, enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1998 following high school graduation. After honorable discharge, he enrolled at the University of Kentucky in 2003. He moved to the Wilmington area in 2010.
Ronnie’s interest in bees started as a youngster. He recalls several of the old Kentucky farmers having beehives out behind their barn. One early memory was a fishing outing with his dad when the property owner was out checking his hives near their fishing spot. When he closed up the hives, the beekeeper gave them a chunk of comb filled with honey.

“I’m excited about this opportunity to learn about beekeeping and eventually pass the knowledge on to fellow veterans,” Hazlett said in a statement released by the Delaware Department of Agriculture. “I’ve been interested in having my own hives ever since I was a kid.” Ronnie hopes to “hand my child or grandchild a piece of honeycomb and give them that same memory.”

The original investment has grown substantially. Hazlett expanded the four original colonies into 8 full colonies and 5 additional nucleus colonies the first season. The apiary was also able to produce approximately 35 pounds of honey in its first season.

Now, as the second full season is wrapping up, Planting Hope’s 2016 numbers are amazing compared to the previous year. Going into winter after the second season, the apiary now hosts 20 hives. In 2016, nine colonies were used for honey production, bringing in just shy of 1000 lbs of wildflower honey. The remaining hives were used to produce nucleus colonies; twenty nucleus colonies were sold to new and established beekeepers in the Delaware Valley region.

The honey was sold at the Urban Farm’s campus market, where vegetables from the garden are also offered, as well as at Bright Spot Urban Farm, at local farmer’s markets, and through the Facebook Page [https://www.facebook.com/PHWHB/](https://www.facebook.com/PHWHB/). Proceeds from the sales go back into the Planting Hope projects.

To further promote the apiary, Hazlett participated in several local events. He was present at Bartram’s Garden for the Philadelphia Honey Fest, attended a Farmer and the Chef event in Wilmington, Delaware to help support the March of Dimes, and gave a presentation at the New Castle County Detention Center for youth housed and going to school there.

In addition to Honey, Ronnie and his fiancée Amanda have began producing an expansive line of 100% Beeswax candles. “Amanda is terrified by any kind of bee,” Hazlett exclaimed, “but, this has been a great way for her to get involved without having to worry about getting stung!” Amanda’s Candles line includes almost 100 different designs, all of which are offered at farmer’s markets and on the Facebook page.

For the upcoming season, new veteran volunteers are being sought to help grow the program. A second apiary is planned at Victory Village at Boxwood Manor in Port Penn, a new 24-bed housing facility for veterans.

At the summer EAS at the University of Delaware, Marine veteran Hazlett, Faith Kuehn of DOA and veterans project mentor Ray Walker of Walker Apiaries in Northern DE will give a keynote address on their project and the new season’s progress. That presentation is Friday August 4 at University of Delaware Clayton Hall Campus. See [www.easternapiculture.org](http://www.easternapiculture.org) website for details about EAS and the week-long Short Course and conference. Registration will be through the same web site.
DOVER, Delaware -- Delaware veterans interested in beekeeping can apply to be part of the Planting Hope Apiary project, the Delaware Department of Agriculture announced in November.

One veteran will be selected to receive training and mentoring, beehive materials, protective gear, and bees to help establish the hives. Extraction and honey bottling equipment will be arranged, with the veteran to be responsible for other materials and supplies. The two hives will be located at Blackbird State Forest near Townsend.

“This project is a unique way to thank our veterans for their service and sacrifice,” said Faith Kuehn, DDA’s Plant Industries administrator and Planting Hope project manager. “Bees have countless benefits and hold a lot of fascination for many of us, and we want to help lower the barrier to getting people involved.”

Applications from veterans of all branches of the armed forces, including Guard and Reserves veterans, will be accepted through December 23. Interested veterans can submit a one-page summary detailing their interest in beekeeping and their thoughts about developing a pollination and bee products business, as well as three references and contact information. The material should be submitted to Faith Kuehn at the Delaware Department of Agriculture, 2320 South DuPont Highway, Dover, DE 19901, or by email at faith.kuehn@state.de.us.

On veterans day 2016, a press release was issued seeking application from veterans to participate in the continuing program. A new 2-colony apiary will be located in a 2nd Planting Hope apiary in Blackbird State Forest. Yet a future apiary is envisioned for Victory Village at Boxwood Manor in Port Penn, a new 24-bed housing facility for veterans.

The site at Blackbird State Forest will be the second for the Planting Hope Apiary project. The first site is located at the Planting Hope Urban Farm at the Herman Holloway Campus near New Castle. U.S. Marine Corps veteran Ronnie Hazlett II was selected last year as the first veteran partner.