

Killer Bee Expert Puts The Dangerous Insects To Work

Reed Booth is known in Arizona as “The Killer Bee Guy” and he gets calls from police, firefighters and homeowners when the aggressive bees get out of hand.

Killer African bees came to the U.S. more than 10 years ago after they escaped from a lab experiment in Brazil. They bred with European honeybees to create new Africanized breeds. Booth says last summer they were discovered as far north as Wisconsin. “You can’t tell the difference between European and Africanized bees by looking at them with the naked eye. Technically, they’re smaller. But boy, what an attitude. There’s no rhyme or reason to what makes these bees mad.”

Their sting isn’t any different from other honeybees but it sends out pheromones that alert the rest of the hive. Within seconds, thousands of them sting anyone or anything in their path. They’ll chase a person two miles and water won’t deter them. They’ll wait until the person comes up. “The old days of standing still while the angry bees buzz around you are over. Get the hell out of there,” he says, adding that it’s impor-

tant to cover your head because they aim for the nose and mouth.

Booth became a beekeeper in 1989 and started working with Africanized bees when people started calling him with bee problems. “They’d say they’d had bees around for years but that suddenly they’d started stinging horses and cows. I’d tell them their bees had become Africanized.”

He says a hive like that is like a ticking time bomb. “What I tell people is this - it’s like rattlesnakes. It’s okay if they live out in the woods but you don’t want them under your house.”

Booth charges \$95 to remove a swarm and starts at \$195 to remove a hive, plus travel time. He takes the bees home and puts them to work. He says they make twice as much honey as European bees do. “I decided that since they were so productive I’d take them home and put them to work,” he says.

“My greatest fear is a rip in my nylon suit,” he says. “Duct tape is my friend. I use a lot of it.” The bees can sting through the suit but if he thinks it’s going to be a bad removal, he’ll wear a heavy sweatshirt and pants un-



Reed Booth works with African killer bees. “There’s no rhyme or reason to what makes these bees mad,” he says.

der it. That means temps of up to 200 degrees in the suit. “Often, when I’m removing them, it literally feels like hail bouncing off my suit and I can smell the venom.”

He generally “smokes” the bees out. The smoke signals danger in them and they’ll leave willingly. But not always. “I swear these Africanized bees will sometimes leave 2 to 3,000 bees just to mess with me.”

Booth authored and sells the book “Confessions Of The Killer Bee Guy” for \$20 on

his website along with other “killer bee” products. He’s especially proud of his honey mustard. “We’ve been in the world mustard competition for five years and up against 6 or 7 countries. Last year, my roasted garlic mustard took a gold.”

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Barn Finds New Life As Fitness Center

By Dee Goerge

Instead of raising and selling Quarter horses as his father did, Curt Leeseberg uses the Wadena, Minn., family farm to sell another commodity - fitness.

About a year ago, he officially opened The Fitness Barn health club after sawing out the sturdy oak stalls his father built for horses. He replaced the steel roof, insulated, wired and added plumbing, and covered the inside walls in easy-to-maintain steel.

Along with the health club, he also sells sporting goods, nutritional supplements, and is a dealer for Horizon Fitness exercise equipment. The fitness center has top-of-the-line cardio and weightlifting equipment, a large wrestling mat, boxing equipment and wrestling takedown machines.

After losing his job of 22 years in the Twin Cities a couple of years ago, Curt moved to his family’s farm to figure out how to make a living there.

He and his wife, Keri, considered renting a building in town to set up their health club. But the cost of rent, plus remodeling was high. Curt decided to invest the money right on the farm.

“We only remodeled half (the pole barn)

in case it didn’t work,” explains Curt from behind the counter of his 30 by 30-ft. facility.

After one year, the business is working, and Curt hopes to remodel the rest of the building soon. Despite being in the country, the number of clients is growing steadily. Curt’s farm is located less than a mile off busy Highway 71. A bright yellow sign, with the clever logo of a barn within a man’s biceps, brings people in.

Keri notes that The Fitness Barn has good equipment, which people like.

“The biggest thing is people don’t want to wait or work out around a lot of people,” Curt says. His clients set up appointments, and though he can accommodate about 12 people, usually no more than three or four are working out at a time.

A former salesman, Curt stresses personal service. He likes to schedule first time clients when no one else is working out, so that he can explain the equipment and get them started at their own level.

“I always start people out very slowly,” he says.

Curt markets The Fitness Barn with booths



Curt and Keri Leeseberg recently opened “The Fitness Barn” health club on their family farm.

at wrestling tournaments and other events. Local county fairs have also turned out to be great exposure, he says. A website for the business helps sell exercise equipment; Curt recently delivered a piece to northern Minnesota.

While he’s done some radio and print advertising, Curt believes personal contact has netted the most business.

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Curt likes to schedule first time clients when no one else is working out so he can explain the equipment.

Going Organic Boosts Local Meat Locker Business

Organic certification is paying off for Scott Bittner’s meat locker in Eureka, Ill. After 12 years of processing local livestock, Bittner just had his operation certified organic.

“We were getting lots of new business calls asking for organic meat,” says Bittner, who works with local organic producers to fill the orders.

Bittner operates a retail meat store as part of his locker plant and offers beef, elk, bison, pork, lamb and venison for sale. He doesn’t sell organic in the store yet because the local supply is already spoken for.

Two local families who produce livestock under organic guidelines convinced Bittner to apply for certification. They needed a meat processor certified so they

could maintain organic status from farm to market.

“The Midwest Organic Service Association inspected the building,” says Bittner. “We have to process the organic meat first before doing any non-organic meat and have to have paperwork from the producer showing they are certified.”

Bittner processes organic livestock once a week, but says he could do more if supply increased. There’s very little extra paperwork for Bittner, and the process has been worth it.

He plans to expand his locker to better accommodate organic and non-organic producers. He will be adding a freezer, a dock for loading semis and smoking equipment to process hams, bacon, beef sticks and snack food.

“Every bit of business helps,” he says. “For



Scott Bittner works with local organic producers to fill the orders he gets at his meat locker in Eureka, Ill.

it, is it one more way to diversify.”

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