

Hear the buzzzzzz? 2017 Green Ball supporting Ecology Center's new bee hives

By Jim Chilsen, EEA board

Proceeds from the 2017 Evanston Green Ball will help fund the environmental classes and summer camps that make the Ecology Center a popular place on the North Shore, but the biggest party of the year also will give a boost to the center's newest project: honey bee hives.

"Let's make some money for the honey," said Evanston Environmental Association President Dick Peach, the main organizer of the Green Ball. "The Green Ball is a fantastic party, and we hope it also raises awareness about what's happening to honey bees in our country—and what Evanston can do to help."

Honey bees have suffered alarming declines in recent years. Experts estimate bee populations have been dropping by about 20 percent annually, due to a number of factors including pathogens, pesticides, climate change, poor nutrition and parasites.

Why should anyone care? Because honey bees are key to the fertilization of the food we eat. They account for an astounding 80 percent of crop pollination in the United States. So our survival is connected to their survival—and that's where the Evanston Ecology Center can play a role.

With the help of support from the Green Ball, the center plans to set-up an "apiary"—a collection of honey bee hives—this spring. The project offers a unique educational opportunity for Evanston, said Erika Doroghazi, a program coordinator at the Ecology Center.

"Honeybee populations are currently threatened so we will teach about these threats and what we can do to help the bees," she said. "We will also be able to provide education about the fascinating biology, anatomy and behavior of the honeybee."

Doroghazi doesn't mind being called a "bee nerd"—but you don't have to be a "nerd" to see that honey bees are cool:

*They're the only insect that produces food eaten by humans.



*Their wings move at 200 beats per second, and they can fly 15 miles per hour for up to six miles.

*A queen bee at her best can lay 3,000 eggs per day.

*Worker bees are all female. Male bees are called drones and have no stinger. The drones are kicked out of the hive before winter, and they die after mating.

*Honeybees need to fly approximately 55,000 miles and visit 2 million flowers to produce one pound of honey.

If all goes well, the Ecology Center would like to someday harvest extra honey from the hives—by extracting it from the honey comb, and straining it. But there's a lot of work and planning to be done first. Doroghazi doesn't expect to harvest any honey from the hives until the second year, at the earliest.

The primary benefit of the hives will be education—and Evanston gardeners will be pleased with another plus: The Ecology Center's apiary will be great for local plants.

"We are very excited for the project and look forward to sharing it with the community," Doroghazi said.