



LEDGER DISPATCH PHOTO BY KIMBERLY HORG

Capt. Mick Farnham has been a hot air balloon operator, a blacksmith and a ballroom dance teacher.

By Kimberly Horg
KHORG@LEDGER-DISPATCH.COM

A swarm of bees can be a scary sight to many but not for one man who lives in Sutter Creek.

"Bees are absolutely fascinating," Capt. Mick Farnham said.

The female bees do all the work and the males eat and wait for a chance to mate with a virgin queen bee but if they succeed in achieving their goal then they will die. The queen bee is the only bee that can sting more than once without surrendering to death. The female worker bees only live 45 days and work themselves to death gathering nectar, he said.

Farnham likes bees so much that he relies on them to help pay the bills. The worker bees work essentially for him — even though they might not know it. Farnham's business is called Bee Mine Honey Co. He sells candles made out of bee's wax and fresh honey. Bee wax is a by-product of honey so instead of throwing it away, he utilizes it.

"The amount of honey that the bees produce depends all on them and the weather," he said.

Just this past year he started making candles. He sells them where ever he can. Sometimes he can be found walking around town selling them.

When residents in the community find a beehive, Farnham will go out to the property to take it off the hands of the property owner in order to take it back to his

Sutter Creek man raises bees, makes candles and much more

Captain of all trades



LEDGER DISPATCH PHOTO BY KIMBERLY HORG

Capt. Mick Farnham makes candles from bee's wax and honey. He sells them for \$4 to \$5.

home to add to the other eight that he is currently housing.

"I collect bee swarms. I had 18 beehives but now I am down to eight," he said. "When people call the police to report a bee hive on their property, the police refer them to me. I took a swarm off of a hanger one time at the Calaveras Airport, the plane couldn't take off until I got (the swarm) out of there. I do accept gratuities

for removing them."

There are eight different molds that he uses to make his candles. There is a honey bear, a turkey, an angel, a pumpkin, a frog, Santa Claus, a Christmas tree and an ancient beehive (a Skep) that he makes. Farnham gets the candle molds and all other bee supplies from the Bee Store in Sacramento. The candles smell like honey.

Candles made out of bee's wax

are known to burn longer, shine brighter and smell really good, he said.

The white colored candles are made out of wax that has never been used. The dirt on the bees feet causes the color to darken and it means the wax was used over and over in the hive. Besides selling naturally colored candles, he also sells green frogs and or-

SEE CAPT. MICK, PAGE C4

CAPT. MICK

CONTINUED FROM PAGE C1

ange pumpkins that get their color from adding dye to the wax.

Just because he is one with the bees doesn't mean that he has not suffered from their wrath. A couple months ago a beehive broke and because it was dark, he didn't see them crawl up his uniform. He wears a bee suit and veil when handling them but that time he didn't see them get under his beard so he got stung 35 times on his neck, he said.

He knows so much about bees that he performs ancient treatments, Bee Venom Therapy, on people that come to him for this type of healing process. "In a couple of weeks I am going to give a speech on BVT for the Sacramento Bee Association," he said.

Farnham made friends with the bees when he lived in Cupertino many years ago where he rented a barn that was infested with bees.

"I noticed that the windowsill was covered with dead bees that were coming out from a hole in the floor by my

desk. A bee expert in San Jose told me to 'charge them rent' and told me to set up a beehive on top of the hole so they can move in and then I could salvage the honey, it worked. Pretty soon I had several hives but when I moved I sold it all," he said.

To supplement his low income he does this to make some extra money. "I am on social security checks and I am below poverty level so I am doing this to make a buck. I have all kinds of ideas," Farnham said.

Farnham is a "jack of all trades." He got his captain status piloting hot air balloons for over 25 years. He held weddings, gave balloon rides, trained people and repaired balloons from 1974 until 1997. He called the business the "jungle adventure."

"I was one of the first people to try bungee jumping. I designed and built my own system. I would jump off of my balloon before it was popular to do, in 1978. I chickened out a couple times at first and

then did it," Farnham said.

In 1968 he was also one of the pioneers for hang gliding. His adventures don't end there, he was a pipe carrier in ceremonies and practiced healing methods of the ancient Indians. He toured with the Sun Bearer tribe to Hawaii to study with Kahona. "I am a want-a-bee Indian," he said.

He is a professional Santa Claus during the winter, a blacksmith and besides doing weddings in a balloon, he has also done nude and witch weddings, he said.

Farnham was born in Chicago but grew up in Texas. When he was in the U.S. Navy he taught ballroom dancing and launched missiles from Vandenberg Air Force Base. It was at that time that he settled in California.

Because he grew up in times of the great depression he does not like letting anything go to waste. He recently bought quantities of mason jars filled with jam and jelly at a yard sale but noticed that the date on the jars stated

that it was made in the 1982; nobody he knew would eat. He tried to take them to the Interfaith Food Bank but would not take the jellies because of the date so I thought of a way for the jellies not go to waste. There is a particular barn animal that has a reputation for eating anything and leave it up to the piglets to live up to their reputation. In the end the pig from the pig farmer, Uncle Silva, had a good treat.

"The jellies were all fine but nobody would eat them. I tasted it and it was delicious so I did not want it to go to waste he said. I always take stuff from my garden to the food bank and if it can't use then donate it to a pig farm. I knew they would love it. He is not going to give it all to them once, instead he is going to give them a little bit at a time for treats."

He has been in the area for nine years. He moved here to start a balloon business but he never received any calls for rides so he did other trades to earn a living.

"I am an experienced collector and a frustrated farmer," he said.

Farnham said that he has had many other adventures enough to fill a 2-inch thick book full of memories.

The candles that he makes sell for \$4 to \$5. For more information, go to captmick@suttercreek.com or call him at 267-1945.