

Pediatrician Ora Wells Also Cares For Bees

By Norah Davis For
The Transylvania Times

It was 8:15 a.m. on a recent Wednesday, and Ora Wells, a local pediatrician, was attending a meeting at the Transylvania Regional Hospital when he received a phone call from the Brevard post office: “Your bees are here, Dr. Wells. Could you come get ’em?”

At the post office was a package about twice the size of a shoebox, with screens on two sides. About 10,000 bees — 3 pounds worth — were inside, clearly visible. The bees had been in transit for two or three days. No wonder the post office employees were eager for Wells to pick up his package.

Back in the 1980s, Wells had taken up beekeeping as a hobby. The life of a bee colony fascinates him. But he’d drifted away from his hobby until he read about North Carolina being about 100,000 hives short of what is needed for pollinating the state’s crops.

“Well, I thought, I could do my part and put some pollinators out there and have a good time at it,” Wells recalled.

Although bees are not indigenous to this hemisphere, farmers have become dependent on them to pollinate about one-third of the nation’s food crops. Commercial beekeepers travel from state to state hiring out their “migrant worker” bees.

In early spring, about half the beehives in the United States might be in California pollinating the



Brevard pediatrician Ora Wells keeps a close watch over the hive he donated to the Rice Street Community Garden. (Photo by Nora Davis)

almond crop.

Before long, those hives are on the road, some heading to North Carolina, where they pollinate the apple crop while feeding on nectar from apple blossoms.

Today, bees are in trouble. One-third of the bee

colonies raised by U.S. commercial beekeepers died last winter. Similar dramatic losses occurred in Europe and elsewhere.

Scientists believe multiple factors may be in play, including parasites and bacterial and fungal infections.

But one major cause appears to be systemic insecticides, which are inserted into seeds instead of just being sprayed on the plants.

The chemicals circulate through the plant’s tissues and can’t be washed off. As the plants produce pollen,

the bees pick up the insecticide and feed it to their broods.

“France has banned systemic insecticides,” Wells said.

In the U.S., the verdict is not in yet.

In 2012, Wells placed a hive at the Rice Street Community Garden, a volunteer-operated garden on East Main Street operated on land owned by St. Philip’s Episcopal Church.

That was the community garden’s first season, and Wells’ worker bees helped produce 700 pounds of fresh organically grown produce. The volunteers donated all of the harvest, worth about \$3,000, to Sharing House and Bread of Life.

Meanwhile, the bees thrived. The colony was strong, and the hive was full of honey to feed them through the winter.

Every Sunday after church, Wells walked down to check on the bees.

He would put an ear against the hive to hear them buzzing.

“About midwinter, it went quiet,” he said.

There was no evidence of disease or mites. No dead bees. The hive was just empty. What had happened is known as “colony collapse disorder.”

Scientists suspect that bees poisoned by systemic insecticides get lost when they leave the hive and are unable to find their way back.

Bees cannot live outside their colony.

Bees communicate through their pheromones and through what is called a

“waggle dance.”

When bees return to their hive — from as much as three to five miles away — they tell each other where the pollen and nectar is by performing a dance inside the hive.

They waggle back and forth, showing the other bees which direction to go. That is how the others find the pollen they feed to their brood for protein and the nectar they use to make honey for the winter.

In addition to this year’s new hive at the community garden, Wells has a hive at his home and two hives behind his office.

Occasionally, Wells’ young patients catch him looking out the window of his examining room to check on the office bees. The youngsters want to know if their doctor has ever been stung.

“I tell them that I wear a protective bonnet and gloves,” Wells said.

He was stung twice last year, but not so far this year.

Wells is fascinated by how committed bees are to nurturing their young.

“If you put a swarm that has left their hive into a new hive that’s empty except for a brood, they’ll attend to those young grubs. Bees exist to take care of their young,” he said.

A fitting hobby for a pediatrician who takes care of Brevard’s young.

For more information on Rice Street Community Garden, call Norah Davis at (828) 877-4070.

(Davis is a member of the Rice Street Community Garden’s steering committee.)

Ageless Grace Classes Benefit Senior Citizens

By Jeremiah Reed
Staff Writer

You don’t have to leave your chair when exercising at Silvermont Opportunity Center in Brevard.

The exercise program Ageless Grace was created by fitness professional Denise Medved.

It is a functional fitness and wellness program consisting of 21 simple tools (movements) for lifelong comfort and ease.

The program is facilitated by Carol Gerson, a certified Ageless Grace educator/trainer.

The natural movements, which are performed in a chair, promote healthy longevity of the body, mind, emotions and spirit.

Each of the 21 tools focuses on different aging factors, such as joint mobility, spinal flexibility, right-left brain coordination, bone density, muscle mass, cognitive function, fall prevention, systemic stimulation, humor, balance and confidence.

“It’s an exercise that works your whole body,” said Janet Benway, who attends the weekly class at Silvermont. “You don’t leave a chair, so you don’t have to stand up, but it’s so good for your brain.”

Benway said the program helps keep her mentally acute and also helps her cope with occasional bouts of genetic depression.

“There are other exercise programs that do more for your body, but this helps your mind and your spirit, and Carol is so enthusiastic that it’s infectious,” she said.

Alice Taylor, Senior Center director at Silvermont Opportunity Center, is pleased about the success and retention rate of attendees at the weekly Ageless

Grace classes that began earlier this year.

Taylor realizes how important it is to have a movement/exercise class that allows all ages and abilities to participate. Plus, she gets a kick out of seeing and hearing how much fun the students are having.

Based on the science of neuroplasticity, all movements engage the five areas of the brain — strategic, analytical, memory/recall, creativity/imagination and kinesthetic learning.

The classes are practiced to up-beat and nostalgic music.

Jim Cole, who is 91, attends the class with his wife, Charlotte.

“Years ago, a friend of mine who was a cardiologist told me, ‘We’ve been telling people the wrong things all these years,’” Cole said. “‘We’ve told people to sit down and take it easy when they got old, but once you do that your whole body will get weak and you’ll find all sorts of things wrong with you.’”

Joyce D’Agostino said that most people wouldn’t think that sitting in a chair would get someone a lot of exercise.

“I’m a walker, I’m a hiker, I’m a swimmer, but I can say you do get a good workout, and Carol just does a fabulous job,” she said. “I feel so good when I leave, but what also is really key here is not just the workout physically but the workout internally, with all the laughter. I think it’s a great program, and I’m so glad that it’s going to continue.”

Gerson teaches group or one-to-one classes, workshops, and seminars in the greater Asheville-Brevard region.

Last fall, Gerson attained

the designation of “Trainer” and recently conducted two-day certification classes to future educators in Durham, N.C., and Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

Gerson is a former resident of Transylvania County who now resides in Arden.

A graduate of the University of Maryland, Gerson worked for more than 25 years in the hospitality industry and most recently was a long-term care insurance agent.

“It is rewarding to accomplish my mission of changing the quality of

function and confidence in people’s lives,” she said. “One of the best compliments she received was when a student said, ‘I feel like a new person when I leave this class.’”

The 50-minute classes will continue to be offered at Silvermont, on Wednesdays, June through September from 1 p.m. to 1:50 p.m. To attend class, contact Gerson at agelessgrace@att.net or call (828) 606-9931. There is a small class fee. For more information on the program or to view a video clip, visit www.agelessgrace.com



Carol Gerson, far right, leads senior citizens through a series of low-impact exercises that can be done while sitting. The 50-minute classes are offered at the Silvermont Opportunity Center every Wednesday through September. (Photo by Jeremiah Reed)