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ABOVE: Chris Pekarek, golf course superintendent of The Village Links of Glen Ellyn, checks on the hives that are part of the course's apiary.

LEFT: The Village Links harvests its own honey, which is used in its restaurant, Reserve 22. The golf course is in the third year of its beekeeping operations, which started in spring 2016.

Photos by Sandy Bressner - sbressner@shawmedia.com

Village Links producing 'nectar of the gods'

Golf course harvests its own honey with beehives

By **ERIC SCHELKOPF**
eschelkopf@shawmedia.com

GLEN ELLYN – The duties of Village Links of Glen Ellyn Superintendent Chris Pekarek entail more than just making sure the golf course is in good playing condition.

On this particular day, he donned a beekeeper suit to inspect the honey beehives at the village-owned golf course. The golf course harvests its own honey to sell and use in its restaurant, Reserve 22.

"Basically a hive is like a sphere," Pekarek said in talking about how a beehive operates as he worked. "It's like a basketball. And they lay the eggs within that sphere. And then on the outside of it, they collect pollen and put it on the edge of the sphere so that the nurse bees can gather the pollen and bring it in and feed the young."

Aug. 18 is National Honey Bee Day. The event was started in 2009 to promote and educate the public

about the bee industry.

As Pekarek worked, he used a bee smoker to calm the bees.

"The theory is they think it's a forest fire and their tree is going to be destroyed," he said. "So they're trying to ingest all the honey they can to fly somewhere else and find a new home. Their honey is like money, so it's like running around and collecting all the money out of your house before it burns down so you have cash at your new place."

He said he's been stung before.

"I've never been stung with the suit on, but then I do something I think is going to be OK real quick and I get stung," Pekarek said. "And I do have an allergy to bees, but it's not severe."

The golf course is in the third year of its beekeeping operations, which started in spring 2016.

The Village Links is part of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, an education and certification program that helps organizations and businesses protect the environment.

"We joined the program in 1991, and that involves everything from protecting the water quality to reducing chemicals to providing habitats and

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food sources for native birds," Pekarek said. "So it's just a natural extension of the types of programs that we are involved in."

Audubon designated the course as a certified wildlife sanctuary golf course in 1993.

"We were the first public course in the nation to achieve that certification," he said.

The honey is used in specialty drinks in the restaurant's bar, as well

as in recipes. The bees help ensure a healthy ecosystem at the golf course by pollinating thousands of native trees and shrubs.

The honey also is for sale, and it has proved to be a popular item.

"We're going to start harvesting in two weeks again," Pekarek said. "We sell it through the restaurant. We sold it last year, but it was very popular and sold out."

The honey is raw.

"We don't heat our honey to bottle it," he said. "The major manufacturers, they'll heat it because it makes it easy to filter and fill bottles. But the problem is, is it kills all the good microbes that are in there, all the good enzymes that are in the honey. So there's a lot of people that believe that it's very good for your health, especially if you have allergies, to eat raw honey."

He is hoping for a good harvest.

"It's somewhat up to the bees to decide how much honey to bring in," Pekarek said. "And it depends on the weather. We had all that rain in May and June, and then it got hot and dry for a while. It really changes the nectar that's available for the bees."