

# The U's Bees

Campus beehives provide learning opportunities as well as pollination.

**N**estled in two corners of the University of Utah campus, a dozen hives are abuzz with a total of about 150,000 honeybees. In the rooftop garden just off the third floor of the J. Willard Marriott Library, the bees hover around flowers blooming near where about half the hives are housed on an adjacent balcony. The remaining hives are located on a balcony on the fourth floor of the Olpin Union Building, where visitors to the Crimson Room restaurant can see the bees through a locked sliding-glass door near the eatery's entrance. The honeybees all help pollinate not only the flowers but the organic vegetable gardens located on the campus.

"We wanted the hives to be somewhere visible and accessible," says Thomas Bench BS'13, who started the hives in 2012 when he was a student at the U. Bench, who graduated with a degree in environmental studies, had become interested in beekeeping and first installed a hive at his grandmother-in-law's house. He then decided it would be a good idea to see if beehives could be kept on the U campus so students as well as faculty and staff members could learn about beekeeping and the importance of bees to food supplies and the ecosystem, as well as the risks if bees disappear. Over the past 50 years, domesticated bee populations have decreased by about 50 percent due to factors including pesticide use and disease.

Bench sought the help of Chris Rodesch, a U adjunct associate professor of neurobiology who also happens to be Salt Lake County's bee inspector, and Amy Sibul, the Biology Department's community engaged learning coordinator. Bench then applied for and received an \$1,800 grant from the U's Sustainable Campus Initiative Fund to get the project off the ground. The first U hives and honeybees were purchased in the spring of 2012. "We wheeled them through the Union Building after hours to the balcony," says Bench, who has been completing a management



*U student Kirstie Kandaris works in the J. Willard Marriott Library's roof garden to assemble a beehive. The U Beekeepers Association has several hives on a nearby patio.*

Photo by Ayrel Clark-Proffitt, U Sustainability Resource Center

development program with Utah's Winder Farms and still leads the U's beekeeping efforts.

Other students began showing up for the weekly hive inspections, and the University of Utah Beekeepers Association was born. Local school groups also came to visit. Last year, the U beekeeping project expanded with the hives at the Marriott Library. And this year, the U beekeepers received an even larger grant from the Sustainable Campus Initiative Fund—\$5,700—to buy more hives and bees for the two existing campus locations and to help the beekeepers

participate in a NASA study on climate change. U student Stephen Stanko, a sophomore majoring in biology, is coordinating the involvement in the NASA project. Using a special scale, the students will be weighing the hives. By combining that data with notes on local weather patterns, the timing of nectar flows can be determined, indicating when local flora are coming into bloom and if those times are occurring earlier in the season because of possible global warming.

Meanwhile, the U beekeepers plan to start selling honey from the hives this summer at the campus Farmers Market. "Grocery store honey just isn't the same," says Kirstie Kandaris, a U senior majoring in biology who was one of the first volunteers to help with the beehives. The U Beekeepers Association also is offering discounted hives and bee packages to students as well as faculty and staff members who want to start beekeeping in their home backyards. Bench and the other volunteers will be holding informal beekeeping classes at the Union Building hives at 2 p.m. on the first and third Saturdays of each month over the summer for anyone who is interested in learning. For more information, email [uofubeekeepers@gmail.com](mailto:uofubeekeepers@gmail.com). 

Visit [continuum.utah.edu](http://continuum.utah.edu) to view a gallery with more photos of the University's beekeeping.

