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GEORGE F. LEE / GLEE@STARBULLETIN.COM
With the prompting of his wife, Gwen, Anthony Maxfield of Honeygirl Organics turned honey and beeswax into skincare products.

Honey Girl relies on busy bees

By Nadine Kam
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Most people shopping for a new home would look for one free of pests, but for Anthony Maxfield, a couple of beehives were the best assets of a country-zoned Pupukea residence. He said yes to the property and its black-and-yellow-striped tenants.

Already an amiable and adventurous sort, Maxfield dove right into tending the bees, learning to care for them and getting stung many times in the process. But that didn't stop him from increasing his number of hives and harvesting the honey, which he and his wife, Gwen, would then offer as gifts to friends.

"In the middle of harvesting, I'd notice that his hands would get really soft from working with the honey," Gwen said, "So I asked him if he could make me some kind of lotion or something that would help my skin."

In 1998, 10 years after Anthony started working with the bees, he began working on a skin cream. Like the honey, the results were offered as gifts.

In 1999, the couple met chiropractor Christina Sirlin, who fell in love with their cream.

"I've tried a lot of different creams. Some of them were really expensive, and there was nothing I liked as well," Sirlin said. "I did research on beeswax and propolis and learned how nutritious it is. There's really nothing out there that can compare."

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"Whatever you put on your skin goes into the body. It's like a Nicorette patch; the skin absorbs it," said Christina Sirlin, right, of Honeygirl Organics. Gwen Maxfield is the co-founder of the company.

She started recommending the Maxfields' cream to her patients, and eventually partnered with the Maxfields to market it more widely. The result is Honey Girl Organics, with products sold through the company's Web site and a handful of outlets.

Head-to-toe care is available in six products, from a foot balm to face and eye cream, and a jar of "Super Skin Food" featuring royal jelly and vitamin E to nourish body parts prone to cracking and roughness.

The creams utilize extra-virgin olive oil, purified waters and essential oils, with just a touch of honey, so you won't have to worry about attracting those other six-legged busybodies, ants. Because the creams also contain organic beeswax infused with propolis and bee pollen, they might have a few dark specks, which Sirlin says is nothing to worry about. The specks are remnants of the propolis, which she describes as a resinlike paste gathered by bees.

"It has antiseptic properties to ensure a germ-free environment for the bees. They bring it back and mix it with beeswax to seal the hive entrance," she said.

Skin care was a logical next step in the Maxfields' health evolution, starting with Gwen's dietary changes in 1998.

"The older I was getting, the worse I was feeling," she said. "I was taking Advil four times a day. I just wanted to see if I could make myself feel better through diet."

She switched to a vegetarian diet, she said, and noticed her health improved "little by little" until eventually "I felt like a new person, so I wanted to continue going on a natural, organic food diet."

The Maxfields now are proponents of a vegan and 90 percent raw-food diet, in which plant foods and nutmeats are left in unprocessed or barely heated states to preserve nutrition.

"My friends see the results," she said.

Having taken that first step, Sirlin said it's natural to think about other environmental factors affecting health, including the chemicals we put on our skin. "Whatever you put on your skin goes into the body. It's like a Nicorette patch; the skin absorbs it," she said.

"Hawaii has been a good place for us from a health perspective, and the bees are like that, too," said Anthony, who now has 11 hives. "We don't use them for agricultural purposes, so they aren't subject to chemicals or pesticides used on farms. They live in a

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natural state in a jungle on our property and go collect nectar and pollen from flower to flower."

Although the bees were something of a novelty when the Maxfields started learning about them, the hard-working insects have earned their admiration.

"It takes 2 million bee trips to make to make a pound of honey, and eight to 10 pounds of honey to make 1 pound of beeswax," Gwen said.

"I've always been interested in the whole-colony aspect, that whole cooperative thing they do," Anthony said. "They're very industrious. ... Their first six weeks in the hive is spent taking care of the queen, housekeeping. After that, they go out to collect honey."

For those who still aren't sure how honey is made, remember small-kid time when someone taught you to suck the tiny bead of nectar from the bottom of a flower? The honey represents the collected nectar, dehydrated by the fanning of the bees' wings, which concentrates the plants' vitamins and nutrients. Those are the same elements that make honey, noted for its healing properties, prized in skin care.

To the bees, honey is food, which makes Anthony feel a bit guilty about taking it.

"At harvesting time, the bees would be hanging outside the door," he said. "But I'm pretty good to our bees. I always leave them plenty of honey. Some people feed them sugar water at harvesting time, but I don't do that because they have a tendency to get weak."

Honey Girl Organics can be found online at www.honeygirlorganics.com, and at Down to Earth and the Saturday North Shore Market at Sunset Beach Elementary.

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CORRECTION

Saturday, July 22, 2006

» Gwen and Anthony Maxfield are co-creators of Honey Girl Organics. Their last name was incorrectly listed as Maxwell in an article [on Page D1 Thursday](#).

Please see the applicable [Corrections Page](#) for more information.

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