

EGLINTON BUSINESS PROFILE

Learn about the history, unique shops and restaurants in the neighbourhoods along Eglinton Avenue.

Bees Are Life

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EXPERIENCE
EGLINTON



Opened in 2014, Bees Are Life is every bee and honey lover's dream store.

The store carries everything from bee jewellery, bee apparel, bee stationery, bee kitchenware, to dozens of honey (of course!), all locally sourced.

Cathy, who is a real estate broker, runs the store with her husband Michael, who is a lawyer, and her sister Mona, who is also in real estate.

Cathy explained how she went from selling houses to selling honey: "It started out as a hobby. I love

gardening, and a few years ago I noticed that the bee population was declining quickly. I got involved with beekeeping and then I ended up with all this honey."

Cathy is the Chair of the Toronto Beekeepers Cooperative, which operates beehives in four locations: Downsview Park, Toronto Botanical Garden, the Black Creek Farms, and the Fairmont Royal York Hotel (rooftop). It is a win-win arrangement for everybody involved because the gardens get bees to pollinate the flowers, and the beekeepers get somewhere to place the beehives and harvest honey.

"I met many beekeeping friends, and they too had all this honey. We started selling in farmers' markets and gift shops, and then it made sense to open a retail store. All the honey you find in this store is from Ontario."

Bees Are Life has approximately 35 suppliers of honey. The honey ranges from a light, refreshing taste to a rich, molasses-like texture and flavour.

Customers often ask Cathy which honey is best, but she says everyone's tastes are different and there are many favourites.

"The same swarm of bees from the same location would produce a very different tasting honey one month to the next. It all depends on the flowers and the nectar the bees consume."

Bees For Life customers receive a loyalty card, which is good for one free jar for every 10 purchases, which encourages customers to try all different types. Samples for every jar are also available in the store. Children under 14 receive a free honey stick for every visit.

According to Medical Daily, benefits of honey include boosting memory, suppressing cough, aiding sleep, alleviating allergies and boosting energy. Burning beeswax candles also cleans the air.

Gourmet jars of honey that can easily sell for \$30 at gift shops are available at Bees For Life for \$10. In fact, all of Bees For Life jars retail for about \$10 for 500ml, making them very competitive in the local or organic product market. Bees for Life also sells limited edition products such as "Super Moon Honey" which was harvested on the day of the supermoon and lunar eclipse in September.

"Since bees fly everywhere, it is virtually impossible to get honey certified as 'organic.' However, we use all organic practices at our farm," explains Cathy, whose personal bee farm is in the Warden Avenue and Stouffville Road area.

In addition to selling honey, Cathy loves raising awareness on the plight of bees. Bees have had a rough 15 years or so, due to pesticides, loss of natural habitat, and varroa destructor mites. And, according to Cathy, bees pollinate 90% of what we eat, so without bees, food supply would be totally disrupted and we are in a lot of trouble. Fortunately, new provincial regulations on the use of industrial pesticides will help slow the demise of bees. Every jar of local honey purchased helps local beekeepers, thereby helping the bee population.

There is a t-shirt at Bees For Life that best sums up the importance of bees: It quotes Einstein - "If the bee disappeared off the surface of the globe, then man would have only four years of life left."

Let's keep buying local honey.

