

A Brief History of Bee City USA from Its Founder for Asheville's Great Buzz Gathering 2022

I invite you to travel way back in time with me to 2011 when a group of Buncombe beekeepers were alarmed by the decline of honeybees and other pollinators. Instead of just wringing our hands, we decided to do something about it.

We had no money to invent a whole new program, BUT we had something even more vital—passionate “pollenteers!” So we took Margaret Mead's wise quote to heart: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

Our initial steering committee researched what could be done to conserve pollinators that wasn't already being done by some other organization, and what could we learn from their efforts? Secondly, we explored what could change our land management paradigms in a way that would allow the pollinators to not only co-exist with humans, but even flourish, even in cities?

We landed on a city certification program with commitments that required significant effort, but had achievable goals. And, it required little to no financial inputs; the currency was pollenteers like ourselves.

But an idea is just an idea until it's acted on. On June 26, 2012, Asheville City Council acted! They were the first in the nation to adopt the Bee City USA resolution, making Asheville the birthplace of a national program that has even been copied in neighboring Canada.

Fast forward ten years to 2022 in the program's birthplace. I'd like to thank the local pollenteers who lead Asheville's Bee City USA committee at Asheville GreenWorks. GreenWorks took responsibility for managing Asheville's Bee City program in 2017. We had been collaborating with GreenWorks almost since the inception of Bee City USA.

BCU Asheville Leadership:

- Asheville Greenworks staff: Joele Emma, Tallis Monteiro, Dawn Chavez
- City of Asheville BCU Liaison from Office of Sustainability: Kiera Bulan
- BCU-AVL Leadership Committee: Pictured: Betsy Savely (co-chair), Lisa Wagner, Virginia Currie, Marie Woodard, Jordan Diamond, Bruce Mowry, Rebecca Robertson, Ruth Gonzalez, Florrie Funk, Bill Jones, Bryan Tompkins, Terri Lechner, Mark Traub, Emily Leonard, Renee Caldwell

Recognizing the program had outgrown the capacity of one pollenteer to handle, in 2018, I asked the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation to adopt the BCU program—and they did! I continued directing it as a Xerces staff member until I retired at the end of 2019.

Xerces has the largest pollinator conservation program in the world. Now, the Bee City program has 149 certified affiliates and the sister Bee Campus USA program for universities has 131 certified affiliates for a total of 280 affiliates in 44 states.

Here in Western North Carolina alone, we have six cities (Asheville, Hendersonville, Highlands, Boone, Laurel Park, and Hayesville) and five campuses (UNC Asheville, the NC Arboretum, Warren Wilson College, Blue Ridge Community College, and Appalachian State University). Tiny cities like Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, and our largest cities like Atlanta, Seattle, San Francisco and even our nation's capital, have applied and become certified.

So I thank everyone at the Great Buzz Gathering for your pollinator advocacy and invite you to celebrate Bee City USA's 10th anniversary here in Asheville throughout 2022. As the late entomologist E.O. Wilson described them--Just like "the little things that run the world," each pollenteer has way more power for sustaining our planet's rich biodiversity than we realize. So the 10th anniversary is really a celebration of each of you!

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