

Perchaluk Apiaries

Chris Perchaluk recently came out of retirement to compete in the 2021 Northern Manitoba Trappers Festival King Trapper's competition and won for the fourth time. 12 years ago, Chris was a spectator, not a competitor. This all changed when he filled out the entry form to become a King Trapper competitor. At first, he was intimidated, but spent the first few years observing and learning from the other competitors searching for ways to inch up the score board. With much patience, practice, patience, practice, patience, and more practice he eventually started to see the results that he needed to be in the top standings. Each time that he competed he discovered a new way to create the necessary points to bring him up the score board of the competition. His overall comments when asked about the most challenging aspect of the King Trapper competition is "staying in great physical fitness". This story is about the influence of our parents on our lives, the choices that we make, and the dreams that come true through hard work and perseverance. It is also about the symbiotic relationship between mother earth's creatures and how our actions can cause harmful effects, sometimes without the understanding and knowledge that we are doing harm. Chris and Bill Perchaluk are beekeepers operating within the boundaries of the RM of Kelsey. They make their living looking after the bees and bee hives, reaping the rewards of the collective efforts of the bees, and their efforts. The end result is the delicious honey substance brought to our tables.

Chris was born in The Pas growing up five miles east of town on Ralls Island. His father Bill Perchaluk is a great outdoors man, encouraging his four children to become independent thinkers and appreciate nature and the outdoors. Chris recalls ice fishing on the Saskatchewan River as a child in the spring running from hole to hole with his fishing stick. He remembers the good feeling of the fish pulling on his line. He recalls his father, two brothers and sister having the time of their life as they spent the afternoon fishing. It was the excitement of these kind of days that he looked forward to as a youngster. The family took many fishing trips together, often in front of Louie Maggie's place situated on the shorelines of the Saskatchewan River. Bill was an avid hunter. As a youngster Chris was allowed to tag along but not allowed to hunt until he was much older. His first successful moose hunting experience happened when he was 20. Chris was always a big outdoors person understanding the important relationship between nature and humankind. He is a certified trapper, with a registered trap line maintained by his father and himself. He feels his best when he takes his annual three-day hunting trip into the wilderness. It is here that he feels relaxed, at ease and in the zone. He easily leaves behind his cell phone, taking time to decompress. He is a thinker, often working long hours at whatever he takes on.

Chris loved to play hockey as a teenager. At the age of 14 years old he moved to Thompson to further develop his skills. At 16 years, he moved to Melfort, Saskatchewan to play hockey at the next level. Here he was recognized for his hockey skills with a possible option to play University hockey in the United States. At 20 years, he was formally presented with this hockey opportunity and after much deliberation declined the scholarship. Hockey is hard on the body, requiring the combined finesse of speed, power, and teamwork. The hazards of playing hockey cannot be completely eliminated. At that time, he reached a crossroads, questioning what he really wanted in life. His decision returned him to The Pas where he joined the family business as a professional beekeeper at the Perchaluk Apiaries. It was around this time that he married a high school love who he had been secretly enamored with, Heather Duncan.

Chris never lost his love for hockey. While raising his family, he spent 16 years coaching minor hockey in The Pas. Chris and his wife Heather have both spent thousands of hours at the local arenas. All three of their children expressed interest in sports centered around the arena. Both boys joined hockey and their daughter wanted to be in the figure skating program. They tied on their blades at the early age of 4 years. Chris and Heather invested in their children supporting each of their interests. The wheels of the vehicle never stopped rolling, driving them to hockey practice and figure skating lessons, hockey tournaments, and skating carnivals. These events took the family to the Roy H. Johnston Arena on a regular basis as well as around the province to hockey tournaments. Heather actively supports her daughters love for figure skating. Grandparents and family members cheer them on in the stands, encouraging them to develop skills, build self-esteem, independence, and confidence. The Perchaluk family have made an incredible volunteer commitment to the sports that their children are involved in. They spend their weekends and down time promoting sport through coaching, fundraisers, planning events, and working at tournaments and carnivals.

Chris's interest in hockey had recently presented him with an opportunity at a competitive level as general manager and head coach. In 2019-2020 season, Chris had been hired on with the local Blizzard Junior A hockey team. Although this position was short lived, he enjoyed his time with the Blizzards which brought out the competitive spirit that lives within him. He takes the opportunity to learn from each experience and has learned much from his time with the Blizzards.

The apiary is the place where Chris and Bill can be found throughout the summer months. This business is on a grand scale. It started 40 years ago purchasing 20 hives. Today the business supports 1500 hives, spread around various locations away from the highway west of town. Bill and Chris have built strong relationships with many of the local farmers in the Carrot Valley, securing space on their property for the bees to work during the summer. The benefit is twofold, as the bees pollinate the canola and plants for the farmers. Pollination is needed for the plants to reproduce; the bee serves this purpose. In their quest for nectar, the bees brush against the stigma and stamens, transferring pollen from one flower to the next. The bee pollinates many plants, including alfalfa, blueberries, cabbage, clover, cucumbers, garlic, lettuce, onions, pumpkins, rhubarb, strawberries, sunflowers, and canola. There are many other plants they pollinate, but these ones are common in our northern region. Many farmers grow canola here, and the blooms attract the bees with their scent and coloration. The bees are busy flying around the clover and canola fields in the valley. The years of flooded fields in the valley had a harmful ripple effect on the apiary. The lack of planted fields for the bees to pollinate, created food shortage for the bees, and consequently no honey production. Although the production of honey varies from year to year, typically 150,000 pounds of honey is extracted, shipped, and sold to BMade Honey. This honey which is a Kirkland product starts here in the tri community of The Pas and is then shipped overseas to Japan, Germany, and the Eastern Countries. The honey is also distributed through Kirkland to Costco stores.

During the summer months, the operation is steady. It is all hands on during the daylight hours of the summer, which is a long work day in northern Manitoba. The operation employs 10 individuals who assist with the many tasks required for the business. Physical fitness is a must in this business, as the job demands many hours on your feet, lifting, moving, and working in harmony with the bees and the owners. In the spring, the hives are cleaned and checked for disease and infection. Many diseases can wipe out a whole colony. It is important for those wanting to start up a small hobby beehive to ensure that disease is not brought into the area. One infected beehive can destroy the entire colony and the

livelihood of this operation. The Perchaluks encourage those interested in starting up a hive to contact them for advice on purchasing disease free bees. Bees are fascinating and amazing little creatures. The bees have honestly earned the saying ...busy as a bee. They are busy and so are the entrepreneurs who operate the business of Perchaluk Apiaries. During the off season, Chris has been invited to local schools to educate about bees and trapping. He shares his knowledge with youth and encourage them to participate in these types of land-based activities.

The bee colony operates with one quest in mind: protecting the colony. The Queen Bee lives for three years with the worker bees having a much shorter lifespan. The drones are the male bees, whose sole purpose is to breed the Queen Bees. Once the honey production is over, the bees throw the drones out of the hive. During the long summer days, the worker bees fly continuously from 3 a.m. to 11 p.m. They live about 6 weeks, eventually wearing their wings off. As they fly, they get little frays in their wings from brushing against grasses, branches, and plants. Eventually their wings fall off and they then become a part of the food chain. They are eaten by ants and dragonflies. The highway presents many hazards to the bee, so the Perchaluks tuck the bee hives far away from this danger. Bees have been known to fly up to five kms in search of nectar. The time for honey collection is short. The honey is extracted from the honeycombs into 5-gallon pails. They are then transferred into 45-gallon containers and shipped off to the buyer.

The Perchaluk Apiaries also block their beeswax product into 50-pound bulk blocks and sell them to buyers in New York for the cosmetic industry. The pure soft beeswax is used in many cosmetic products such as lipstick, soap, salves, moisturizers, hand creams, eye liner and blush. Beeswax has protective and lubricating properties to deter dehydration in the skin, creating a protective wall sealing in moisture without clogging the pores.

Although Chris does not have much free time, he makes the most of his time. Along with this wife, Heather, they created a master plan to follow. Both of them wanted to live in the country and were patient to bring it all about. In 2004 they purchased property on Ralls Island with the Saskatchewan River flowing past them. In 2008 Chris built himself a storage garage combo workshop. In 2014 they started building their home. They moved into the home in 2016 and continue to work towards creating the life that they desire. They heat this entire set up with a wood fired outdoor boiler. Chris is extremely energetic taking the time to bring the wood in each year in the fall. He is well organized, keeping his life busy with family, with competition, with volunteering, with trapping, and with his bees.

Thank you, Chris, for sharing your story with our community. More good things are sure to come your way.

Make Shift Happen.

Written and Submitted by Denise Duncan