

West Virginia Department of Agriculture

Walt Helmick, Commissioner



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BEEKEEPING TRAINING FACILITY TO BE DEDICATED TO AIR FORCE VETERAN

Charleston, W.Va. – The West Virginia Department of Agriculture is helping make the last wish of a dying veteran come true. On Saturday, August 29, 2015, Commissioner of Agriculture Walt Helmick will be on hand at Geezer Ridge Farm in Hedgesville to dedicate the Major Byron “Mark” Cato, USAF (Ret) Memorial Veterans Bee Keeper Training Facility.

Cato, a veteran of the United States Air Force, who flew multiple combat missions and served nearly two decades as an Air Force pilot, was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer in recent weeks. With only days to live, his friends and colleagues from the West Virginia Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture program have established a fund and coordinated a ceremony to honor Cato.

The current training site at Geezer Ridge Farm has assisted dozens of veterans since its start in 2013. Veterans learn about the apiary business and then put that knowledge into practice. Cato and his wife Teri, also a veteran, were part of the program’s 2015 class.

Ed Forney, the owner of Geezer Ridge and the training specialist, says beekeeping became a big part of the Catos’ lives, and naming the site in Mark’s honor is the right thing to do.

“When I told Mark, he was so excited. He was in tears,” says Forney.

James McCormick, the Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Coordinator, says of Cato, “He has spent his entire adult life serving this nation. Mark loves beekeeping and wants to continue the legacy. He’s at the end of his life. He’s opting to go through additional chemo treatments so he’ll be able to stand for this event. It shows a tremendous amount of courage. That’s exactly the kind of person we want to build the beekeeping legacy on.”

The event is set for 10 a.m., August 29 at Geezer Ridge Farm, 173 Rooney Rd, Hedgesville, WV 25427. For more information, you can contact Ed Forney at 304-702-3848.

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