



Pixie Mead bottles several varieties of its product here in the Methow Valley.



All photos by Steve Mitchell

Benjamin Pixie made his first mead at 18. Now Pixie Mead brews the beverage using honey from his own bees.

FROM BEES TO BOTTLE

Pixie Mead debuts unique new Methow Valley products

By Joanna Bastian

PIXIE Mead is more than just sunlight and nectar gathered by bees and collected into bottles by the Pixie family. Pixie Mead is a bee sanctuary nestled in the foothills of the North Cascades. Here, Benjamin Pixie, Maeyoka Brighthouse

and their children nurture the land and their treatment-free hives. This act of reciprocity culminates in unique botanical meads that celebrate both plants and bees.

Pixie made his first mead when he was 18. He described the experience as a gateway drug to beekeeping.

To continue making mead and

to learn more about the process, he partnered with beekeepers to learn the art of caring for pollinators and harvesting gifts from the hive. He captured his first swarm a few years later and started Pixie Honey Company.

Mead is often described as a honey wine — made when honey ferments with water — but is technically in its own class of alcoholic beverage. The alcohol content is on a range similar to wine. The

taste depends on the honey, and on any other ingredients added by the brewers.

A BEE-CENTRIC APPROACH

For a time, Pixie worked for a large almond pollination company. “It was heart-breaking and eye opening,” he says. Because of that experience, Pixie dedicated himself to learn how to listen to



At Pixie Mead, the whole family gets involved in beekeeping.



the bees and support their needs. He developed organic, treatment free, bee-centered methods of care, including frequent splitting to break up the brood cycle, a smaller foundation to mimic a natural cell size, and access to an abundance of various types of organic pollinator habitat in remote locations. These practices enrich the health of the bees and the products harvested from the hive: pollen, propolis, wax and honey. With his background in botanical medicine, Pixie looks to the bees as an inspiration to create food as medicine.

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Pixie and Brighthouse initially met at a Skalitude resort gathering near Carlton. The two connected

over their shared love of bees — Brighthouse was a beekeeper working on small farms. The couple kept returning to Skalitude, a place where their children took their first steps, and where the couple held their commitment ceremony. When the opportunity blossomed, Pixie and Brighthouse moved to Skalitude. High above Libby Creek at the end of Smith Canyon, Pixie knew this land wanted to make honey. The name “Skalitude” is a Salish word that translates as, “to be in harmony with nature.”

Pixie Mead is a family business. The youngest two children of the Brighthouse-Pixie family, 7 and 8 years old, enjoy working with the bees. The young ones enthusiastically suit up in their own child-sized bee suits and examine frames



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of brood. The older two siblings assist with extracting honey and bottling product.

Between the Methow Valley and the western side of the North Cascades, Pixie Mead cares for 60 to 100 hives at any given time. The different ecosystems yield a myriad of flavors each season. Maple Blossom Honey is produced on the west side of the mountains when the maple trees flower and the nectar flows. A strong maple blossom season only happens every three to four years, when the spring weather is just right. Brightheart and Pixie agreed, the maple honey and mead were personal favorites. Wildflower honey and mead is primarily produced from Skalitude's meadows and surrounding forests.

A POLLINATOR SANCTUARY

The Pixie style of beekeeping can best be described as a conscientious practice of reverence towards plants and bees. As noted on the Pixie Mead website, www.PixieMead.com, the production of mead benefits the ecosystem from where it was harvested. As honeybees pollinate and fertilize plants and flowers, the land becomes, "more diverse, more fecund, and more abundant..."

Brightheart sees Skalitude as a pollinator sanctuary – an example of what is possible through reciprocity with the land and pollinators. "We bring together bee medicine and plant medicine. We like to make things that taste



Benjamin Pixie works at the Pixie Mead bottling facility. Their products are available at select retail outlets in the Methow Valley.

really good, and we want to inspire more people to have reverence for bees."

In a normal year, 5% of Pixie Mead profits go towards building and restoring habitat for honeybees and other pollinators. The effort increased ten-fold in 2020, despite a decrease in profits as a result of COVID pandemic precautions. Historically, most sales occur at annual festivals. COVID precautions closed the festivals in

2020 and Pixie Mead shifted gears to weather the change. Pixie Mead focused on distribution to retail outlets through Methow Made and providing online sales for customers.

The Methow Investment Network made it possible for Pixie Mead to expand critical resources through the purchase of equipment and additional plantings to expand pollinator forage. The slowdown in business gave



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Pixie Mead uses treatment-free hives to harvest the honey for its products.

them time to build and plant. “We have not traveled this year and we’ve been able to focus on the land and bees,” Brightheart said. Walking towards the meadow, an expansive plowed garden came into view. Pixie gestured to the meadow and growing plants. “We planted more pollinator forage and drought tolerant plants to feed bees and native pollinators during the dry dearth of summer,” he said, listing drought tolerant native species, such as Russian Sage, that are critical to pollinators during dry summer months.

WHERE TO BUY

Pixie Mead offers a wide range of organic products from the hive. Honey is available in a variety of flavors: Skalitude’s wildflower honey, blackberry and maple honey from the west side, and infused honeys with flavors of rose, arrowleaf balsamroot, hawthorne berry and more.

Customers will find high-quality beeswax and candles, pollen, salves and specially formulated tinctures and tonics. And, the highlight, Pixie Mead craft meads are brewed using an array of different honeys and infused with

wildcrafted botanicals to create a delicious collection of honey wine.

The Pixie Mead Club offers members a complimentary tasting flight at the Skalitude Honeybee Sanctuary tasting room, a first taste of Pixie Mead’s newest creations, and the option to purchase last bottles before a batch sells out.

Pixie Mead products can be found at Methow Valley Goods on the TwispWorks campus, on the Methow Made displays in retail stores, and online at www.PixieMead.com.

WHAT’S NEXT

“I really want to take this opportunity to share the news of our up-and-coming distillery in Okanogan County,” Pixie said. In the future, The Spirit of the Hive distillery will produce honey spirits infused with botanicals that Pixie grows, or wildcrafts. Customers can look forward to tastings at the Skalitude Lodge featuring Pixie Honey Mead and future Spirits of the Hive products like honeyshine aged in oak, and honey absinthe.

To learn more about Pixie Mead, visit www.PixieMead.com.

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