

BY TED CUSHMAN

‘Thank You, Mr. Bee Man!’

It was bad enough when Hurricane Harvey flooded Karen Knight's Houston home with 6 inches of water. But when the walls were gutted, Knight got another bad surprise: an enormous bee colony between the studs.

Help arrived in the form of Claude Griffin, founder and owner of Gotcha Pest Control, in Richmond, Texas. Griffin, who specializes in bees and lives by the motto, “Hard Work is a Sweet Thing,” removed the bees for a minimal fee. It's a routine occurrence for bee-expert Griffin; his company does at least a dozen charity jobs a year, he told *JLC*.

The son of a pest-control contractor, Griffin fell in love with bees when working for his father as a youth and founded Gotcha in 1984. “I don't know why I get off on being in a hot bee suit in the middle of August, but it makes me happy,” he told *JLC*. “I feel good.” Griffin doesn't destroy the bees; he “rescues” the hives and gives them to local beekeepers. He also harvests the honey, making it available (typically as a gift) under his own “Gotcha” brand. “It's not like honey you get in the store,” he said. “This is the kind of honey people struggle to get. And I give it away.”

Doing good for others is part of the thrill, said Griffin. His voice falters as he describes the time when a young child who had made her own bee protection suit out of window screens from her family's trailer brought Griffin a drink of water as he labored under the trailer in the heat, saying, “Thank you, Mr. Bee Man!”

“It set me back in my seat for a few days,” said Griffin. “She made that suit herself so that she could wait for the school bus without getting stung. Then she risked her own safety to bring me a drink of water. But I pulled 400 pounds of honey out from under that trailer.”

Griffin's hard work and personal energy have made him a media celebrity: He has worked with Animal Planet reality TV star and animal-control expert Buck Medley (“Buck the Lone Star Legend”), filming an episode called “Buzz Kill.” In 2013, he starred in an episode of the TNT show “72 Hours,” braving the hazards of an island off the coast of Australia.

Griffin likes to leverage that media attention to help others. Often, he said, struggling families he helps with a bee problem get attention and help from others in the Houston market. “All these wonderful people here in the news media,” he said, “after I tear a house up to get the bees out, they find somebody to fix it.”

Ted Cushman is a senior editor at JLC.



Photos by GOTCHA Pest Control