



24 Sustainability Success Stories in 2024
Story 12 of 24: Grounds Keeping and Gardens

A Sweet Journey: Beekeeping at UPMC

Yes, bees are buzzing around our campuses!

Did you know that UPMC Magee-Womens Hospital, UPMC Shadyside, and UPMC York Memorial Hospital all have beehives on their campus? At Magee, the honey is harvested for use in kitchen recipes, like homemade honey mustard. These hives bring awareness of the importance of hosting pollinators in our gardens and green spaces to support the local ecosystem. In edible gardens, harvesting success relies greatly on healthy pollinator communities.

Each hive contains 10 frames, where bees diligently craft honeycombs. The flavor of the honey depends on the flowers the bees gather pollen from. There are typically two different types of honey: spring and autumn. Mature hives can yield between 25 and 100 pounds of excess honey annually, and the hives only need to be checked once or twice a month in the spring and summer, and even less frequently in the late fall and winter. The bees in these hives can travel about 3 miles while harvesting pollen.

Tom Hritz, former director of Food and Nutrition Services at Magee and current program director at the Magee-Womens Research Institute, started two hives there in 2016. Thanks to a grant from the Magee's Volunteer Service Board, two more were purchased in 2023. Magee currently has four bee colonies.

Simone Frerk, UPMC vice president of Food and Nutrition Services, brought the idea of beehives to Shadyside. **Kathleen Zell**, vice president of Operations at UPMC Shadyside, became the executive sponsor for the initiative there. They currently have one hive located in the green space at Luna Garage. Since the hive hasn't been around for a full year, only a small amount of honey has been harvested so far, and it has been given to employees. Once they can harvest regularly, they hope to use it in the hospital kitchen. They also plan to hold employee education programs related to the beehives.

At UPMC York Memorial, there is currently an active hive on campus, and a successful apiary is part of the Farm to Hospital program's vision. **Dr. KimberLee Mudge**, a breast surgeon and leader of the farm-to-hospital program, spoke about the purpose of the bees at York Memorial.

"The purpose of our beehives was to promote healthfulness in the form of more natural sweeteners, but, more importantly, to provide an example of 'community,'" Dr. Mudge said. "Beehives represent the most civilized community on the planet, where everyone works in harmony for the greater good. We could learn a lot from the life of a honeybee."

"Honeybees are fairly docile creatures, and over this past year, I learned so much about them that I wasn't aware of," Simone added. "They are very interesting creatures."