

Partnership helps produce Sarasota honey – Herald Tribune -By Ian Cummings Published: Tuesday, January 27, 2015

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On her first day of bottling honey for a local beekeeping operation, Rebecca Jordan declared the work “easy.”

It was simple compared with her other job, working in the bakery at the Community Haven for Adults and Children with Disabilities Inc. on DeSoto Road. Her coworker there, Megan Maus, said the bakers take pride in their skills. “It’s handmade, from scratch. We don’t use cake mix,” she said. Filling bottles then, presented little challenge for Maus and Jordan, two of the dozens of adults who live and work on the 32-acre campus for people with mental and physical disabilities. It is just one of the industrial operations that employ workers here, and it will grow more elaborate in time. Later, the workers could be trained in making soap and hand-rolling candles from the bees wax.

The wax and honey comes from the Sarasota Honey Co., a husband and wife beekeeping business that has partnered with Community Haven to bring production here and employ residents. The products are sold online and in local stores. Alma Johnson, the head beekeeper, said the partnership with Community Haven was a natural fit for her business. “They picked up on it like a fish to water,” she said.

People are often surprised by what the workers here can do, said Brad Jones, Community Haven’s vice president of operations. Jones oversees 17 other work programs, from assembling mechanical parts for appliances to packaging aquarium gravel.

“We look for unique things, thinking outside the box for things that our guys can do. They really like repetitive tasks, like filling the bottles” with honey, Jones said. The jobs pay at least minimum wage, and employ more than 160 workers at Community Haven, with more on a waiting list. People with disabilities are especially vulnerable to unemployment and poverty, according to the U.S. Bureau of

Labor Statistics. Community Haven has plans for expanding its housing and work facilities, and will break ground on new buildings next month.