

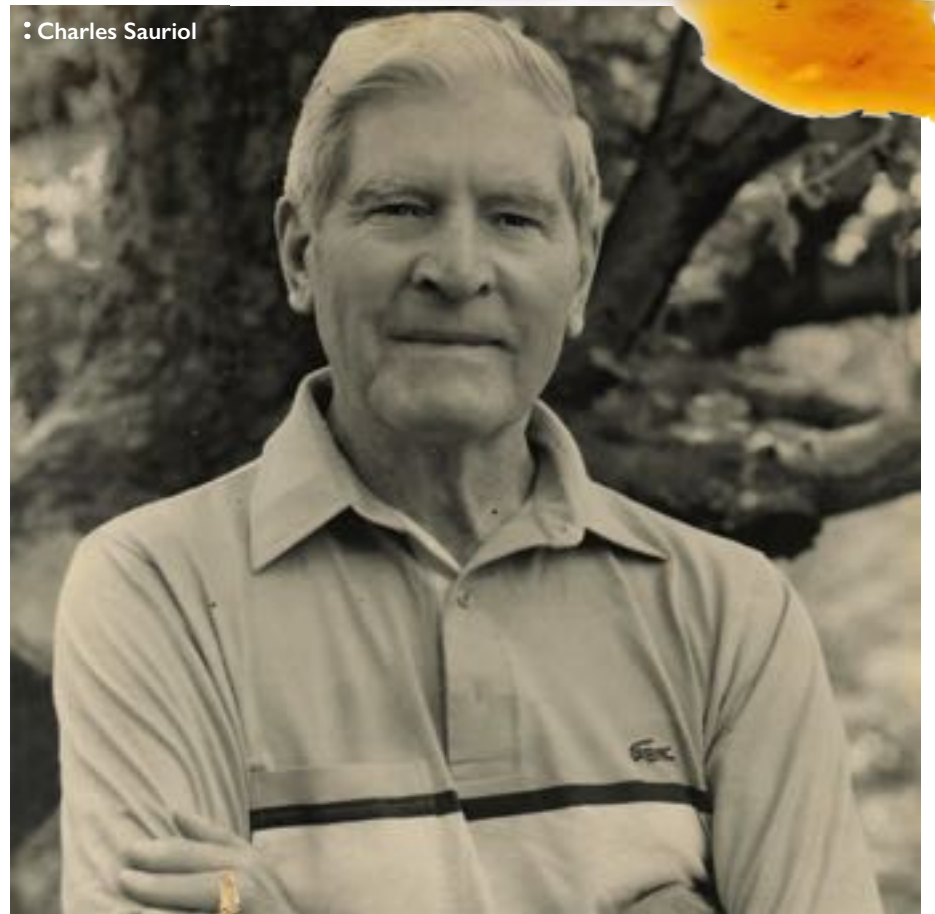
## Around the Neighbourhood



• Andre Flys in the  
• Pioneer Brand  
• Honey storefront



• Charles Sauriol



# SWEETER THAN HONEY

— THE STORY OF PIONEER BRAND —

by Julia Galt

When eight-year-old Andre Flys first followed his grandfather out towards the beehives scattered on the precipice of Don Valley wilderness, he had little idea he was taking the first steps towards what would later not only become a career, but the continuation of a rich family history stretching back to the early 1900s. What he did know, in typical childhood fashion, was that if his grandfather liked beekeeping, well, then he did, too.

Today, forty six-year-old Flys is the owner of Pioneer Brand Honey, a local gem nestled on the outskirts of Nobleton suburbia. Pioneer Brand sells all manners of bee-centric products, from their bestselling wildflower honey, to beeswax-based lip balm and deodorant, to handmade honey soap, beeswax candles, and ever so much more. Stepping into their farm gate store is like stepping into a time long past, when simple, natural, and sustainable products were the go-to for any ailment or need.

Flys' story in honey can be traced far before his birth, all the way back to a brisk April day in 1936. It was the day his grandfather, famed naturalist Charles Sauriol, received his first beehive from "Old Murph" Murphy, a friendly semi-recluse beekeeper living in the lower Don Valley near Sauriol's home. Murph was convinced that a career man like Sauriol needed a good hobby with which to pass his time, and so gifted Sauriol the equipment, advice, and assistance needed to tend a successful hive of his own. Murph's love for bees soon rubbed off on Sauriol, and for decades after Murph's death he continued to care for them, increasing his hives from one to ten- the cut-off, he believed, for what constitutes a hobbyist beekeeper.

Sauriol's passion for beekeeping is well documented. He was a lifelong member of the Ontario Beekeeper's Association, of which his grandson Andre is now President, and contributed numerous articles to the American Bee Journal. His self-published books, *Honey Is My Hobby* and *A Beeman's Journey*, detail a lifetime of peaks and valleys, beekeeping tips and tricks.

But what Sauriol is undoubtedly best known for, and what has seen his name immortalized in Canadian environmental history, are his lifelong efforts in preserving the Don Valley and other natural areas. His founding of the Don Valley Conservation Association in 1946 was instrumental in stoking public support for the area's conservation, and during his tenure at the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority he acquired most of the current conservation lands in the Toronto area. Sauriol is responsible for preserving over 500 properties in Ontario alone; Cold Creek, Black Creek Pioneer Village, and Bruce's Mill are some noted acquisitions. To honour a lifetime of conservation efforts, Sauriol was, in 1989, made a Member of the Order of Canada,

and has been awarded both the Governor General's Conservation Award and Parks Canada's Heritage Award. A section of the Don Valley where Sauriol cottaged for thirty years today proudly bears the name Charles Sauriol Conservation Reserve.

Flys recalls a famed incident in which his grandfather, eager to convince the Metropolitan Toronto Parks Committee of Todmorden Mills' value, bequeathed to the members eight precious jars of honey. The quality of his Don Valley honey, Sauriol asserted, proved there must be something special about the area. Quite aware that if Charles Sauriol was giving away his honey, then he must mean business, the Chairman acquiesced and the area was approved for preservation.

As Old Murph had with him years before, Sauriol made sure to pass along his passion for beekeeping. Son-in-law John Flys, husband to Sauriol's daughter Denise, was among his more dedicated learners. On the Nobleton family farm where he and Denise have lived for over fifty years, Flys began hobbyist beekeeping himself, enlisting his young son, Andre, for help on occasion. It was there, happily working beside his father, and during trips to his grandparents' Don Valley home, that the sparks for the modern day Pioneer Brand Honey were set.

It was a series of happenstance that prompted Andre to become the family's first commercial beekeeper. He, his father, and grandfather had long contented themselves with selling the occasional jar of honey from their hobbyist hives, but Flys' printing business was struggling and it was time for a change. He registered Pioneer Brand Honey as a business in his late 20s, and, when a local beekeeper retired, jumped at the chance to grow his colonies from 30 to over 500. Hitting the farmer's market circuit to sell his products and talk about the benefits of honey, Flys built the brand up, and had established his Nobleton storefront within the decade. Today, the business remains family-centric to the core, with his parents running the 15th Sideroad farm gate store, and wife Kerrie, daughter Peyton, and sons Wesley and Breen helping out in any way they can. Flys operates today with a scaled back 200 colonies, scattered throughout the surrounding countryside. He's eagerly awaiting the grand opening of his new storefront, where he plans to expand his honey products into mead, sauces, and cosmetics.

If one was to place one of Flys' glass honey jars next to his grandfather's clay pots, they'd find little in common but the name emblazoned across: Pioneer Brand Honey. Yet the 84 years behind that name carries a story as sweet as honey itself.

• The Pioneer Brand Honey storefront -  
• 5815 15th Sideroad, Nobleton



pioneerbrand.ca