

Note: C12 is about community and we want to introduce you to the larger community of C12 members throughout North Texas. Look for a series of introductions that you can use to get to know others that share the bonds of C12. – Tom Hawes, Joe Galindo, Mike Gullatt, Tom O'Dwyer

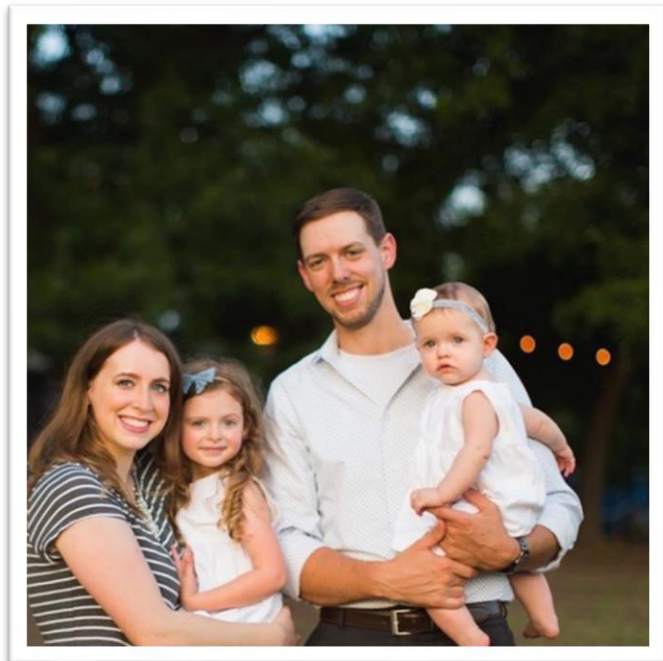


Meet Blake Shook

Blake and his wife Kathleen have been married for ten years. They have two daughters: Ella (6) and Lena (2). They live in McKinney and attend Grace Bible Fellowship in Melissa, Texas. Blake is the founder, owner, and 'head beekeeper' of Desert Creek Honey in Blue Ridge, Texas. He has over 8,000 hives and employs more than one billion bees.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in East Texas in the small town of Canton. My dad is a pastor, and as an early teen, we moved to Blue Ridge which is where my parents still live. I have four brothers and my mom homeschooled all of us! It made for a crazy growing up, but we loved it. We all live in the area within a half-hour of one another.



What are some of your favorite things?

Ever since I was a kid, I have a habit of turning all my hobbies into businesses. So, in a sense, my work is my hobby which is still true today. Because of my work, I have taken a lot of speaking engagements all over the world. We love to travel as a family and my work has allowed us to explore several other countries and every state but Alaska. So, travel is probably the only hobby that has remained a hobby.

How do you like to spend your spare time?

We love hiking, rock climbing, and anything outdoors. I love to cook and so do my daughters, so we enjoy doing that together. We love working in different elements of some of the companies, so they enjoy coming to work with me. My wife and I are both extremely

involved in serving at the church. We also serve in a lot of different ministries together as a family.

What was the last outing that you took with your family?

Last summer, we spent about a week in Washington state and then went up to Canada and spent some time in Victoria. It was just stunning. We did tons of hiking, saw all the gardens, and got to see the coast.

How did Desert Creek Honey begin?

It started as a hobby when I was about 12. I just knew that I wanted to have a chicken farm or a dog rescue business when I grew up. My parents knew that I was serious about starting a business, but they were not crazy about having either one of those things in their back yard. They tried to broaden my horizons by finding a scholarship program that helped get kids involved in beekeeping. There was an active club in McKinney that had just started a program to award kids between 12-17 years old a free beehive, classes, and everything you needed to get started. At the time, only about 6% of beekeepers were under 40 years old and so they were trying to breathe some new life into a dying industry. At the age of 12, I won that scholarship along with a few other kids, although at the time, I was not that interested in beekeeping. It was great to have won something, but I was still convinced that I was going to raise dogs and chickens. I began taking these beekeeping classes, and I remember the first class well. There were five four-hour classes, which is long for an active young boy, and I remember the chairs being hard and uncomfortable. But after the second class, I do not remember noticing that at all. I was just absolutely fascinated.

I completely fell in love with beekeeping and got my first beehive as the class progressed. I just could not help but add more and more beehives to my little business. As I got more and more beehives, I also had and more honey. A local health food store and several local grocery stores began calling and asking if they could get some of the locally produced honey. And that is when it clicked that 'hey, I could make money from this.' I started adding more and more beehives through high school, selling more and more honey, to the point where when I graduated I had 300-400 beehives and was almost making a living. I decided right out of high school to take a one-year break before I went to college to see if I could make beekeeping into a career. I had also met my wife-to-be at



that time and was fairly sure I didn't want to wait four years to marry her. I spent a year entirely focused on the beekeeping business and it went really. I chose to pursue it as a career, decided not to go to college, and I have never looked back.

Since then, we have grown to about 8,000 beehives, and we pollinate crops and produce honey in Texas, North Dakota, Minnesota, and California. One thing that we do that is incredibly unique is we take all the honey that we produce, even some from other beekeepers, and we package it and sell it to grocery stores. That is a relatively new segment of the company that we started about three years ago that is now a separate company. We have a beekeeping company that produces honey. There is a different facility and team that packages it, delivers it, and sells it. We are in stores like Walmart, Market Street, Sprouts, and HEB.



Another business sprung up about three years ago called Texas Bee Supply. My parents and I opened a store in Blue Ridge that supplies the DFW area with beekeeping supplies and offers beekeeping classes almost every weekend. We sell everything to get started with beekeeping. We also sell the bees themselves. We plan on opening a second branch in the Houston area in October.

How do you describe your mission and values?

One of the main reasons I came to C12 was to define and articulate our mission and values for the company. What is most important to us is to:

- Glorify God with the company that He has let us borrow
- Take care of people which means our employees are a high priority over profits and that our customers are well taken care of and are getting a product that they deserve and that is good for them
- Our greatest mission is to serve Christ by serving the people he has put in our lives

How did you become a part of C12?

I began really searching for how to do a better job of incorporating Christ into my business and was looking for resources that could help me. I remembered this ancient business card that someone had given me years ago that I had in my wallet- I can't even remember where it came from or who gave it to me- but it was a C12 card. I contacted C12 which led me to Mike and have been a part of his group ever since. I never went to college and

kind of learned all the lessons the hard way. My companies are built on a thousand different mistakes. I was looking for additional resources and C12 was obviously a perfect fit.

What challenges as a business owner have you faced and how has your group/chair helped with these challenges?

Being a business owner is a lonely job. Most people do not understand the pressures and challenges that you face or the decisions that you must make. Even the family does not understand. C12 gives me a Christian peer group with similar goals, shared values, helpful tips and tricks, and suggestions about how to balance work and life.



I can reach out to anyone in my group at any time to talk about issues I might have to see if they have faced it before. The resources and educational material are also great.

What do you have to offer other C12 members?

The way my brain works means I am a pretty creative thinker. I come from the school of hard knocks and I have learned many things the hard way. I have been at this for 18 years and I have a strong work ethic. I creatively look at problems and find solutions for them.

How do you use your business as a ministry?

We help support/contribute to a group that battles sex trafficking. Recently we partnered with the sheriff's department to create the Collin County Sheriff's Inmate Beekeeping Program. We provided a dozen beehives and are training the inmates to be beekeepers. This has been an excellent opportunity to minister and share Christ while giving them a life skill they can use.