

# Chicago Tribune

## Beehives, solar, megabatteries, plastic foam recycling: Glenview's Abt goes green

'I wish every other business could see how we do things. They'd save money and be recycling.'



From left, on the roof of Abt in Glenview, near the bee hives, are Mike Abt, Abt Electronics co-president, with Brian Thomson of North Barrington, co-president of Honey Lake Bee Company of North Barrington, on Oct. 29, 2024. (Karie Angell Luc/for Pioneer Press)

By [Karie Angell Luc](#) | Chicago Tribune

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The honeybee hives on the roof at Abt Electronics in Glenview are the giant retailer's latest effort at environmentally sustainable initiatives that are also good for the bottom line.

The beehives share space with a plain of solar panels, green-roof plantings, and an industrial-strength Tesla megabattery that stores power. All of those complement the company's recycling efforts — which include the rare ability to recycle plastic foam, sometimes casually referred to by the name of a popular trademarked product, Styrofoam.

They're all at the company's 1200 N. Milwaukee Avenue space in Glenview, which spans about 1 million square feet including the huge retail store, warehouse and recycling center, according to co-president Mike Abt, who shares duties with siblings.

Two bee hives were introduced this past summer on the roof of Abt and have produced a fall bounty of 100 pounds of honey.

Since September, Abt has sold 120 eight-ounce bottles of honey, including regular honey at \$11 a bottle and hot honey at \$14.

With the green roof set among wildflowers and solar panels, Abt, who studied biology in college, said, "It made sense to get some bees. I like the health side of honey that's local."



The queen is on the far right in this frame from the beehive at Abt in Glenview on Oct. 29, 2024. (Karie Angell Luc/for Pioneer Press)

Abt's former neighbor in Glencoe, a veterinarian, kept bees.

"So he gave me the idea a long time ago," Abt said, and through colleagues, Abt found Brian Thomson of North Barrington, co-president of Honey Lake Bee Company of North Barrington. Thomson started beekeeping as a middle schooler and Honey Lake Bee Company is about one decade old.



Mike Abt, formerly of Glencoe, also Abt co-president, in Abt's office with samples of Abt's locally produced honey on Oct. 29, 2024. (Karie Angell Luc/Pioneer Press)

Thomson installed the hives with *Apis mellifera ligustica*, Italian honey bees.

“Honeybees are unique because they’re kind of like a canary in a coal mine,” Thomson said.

“They’re very sensitive to pesticides and very susceptible,” Thomson said. “So if they’re doing well on the roof of Abt, it means that Abt in general is doing very well for the environment.”

The hives may stay on Abt’s roof through their first winter with wrapped insulation, with Thomson checking on them to see if they can withstand Glenview weather. A tall entrance structure along the hives might cut winds.

Hives maintain temperatures of 70 to 80 degrees during cold spells and blizzards, he said. Bees eat their honey supply.

“The bees can handle extreme cold, they just can’t be wet and cold,” Thomson added.

On Oct. 29, Thomson, Abt and Lyndsey Ager, Abt’s marketing manager, visited the roof on a balmy and windy Tuesday.

Thomson pointed out the queen bee on a hive panel. He said it takes time to develop the hive’s presence and Abt should see increased honey production.

“It’s the best honey I’ve ever tasted right off the hive,” Ager said.

Thomson, Abt and Ager stood in view of solar panels.



Solar panels on the roof of Abt in Glenview on Oct. 29, 2024. (Karie Angell Luc/Pioneer Press)

Abt's statistics indicate the main store has 1,500 340-watt solar panels, the new warehouse has 4,200 540-watt panels, and the Recycling Center has 380 panels at 540 watts, totaling to 6,080 panels producing more than 2.6 megawatts of power.

Mike Abt estimated that 70% of the company's energy bill in summer, and about 25% in winter, is saved due to solar panels.

The company also recently installed a Tesla Megapack, which Tesla's website describes as a powerful battery that can store energy, which is important for the future of renewable energy, at Abt's Recycling Center.



From left, in Abt's recycling center, are Brian Thomson, co-president of Honey Lake Bee Company of North Barrington, and Mike Abt, formerly of Glencoe, in Glenview on Oct. 29, 2024. (Karie Angell Luc/for Pioneer Press)

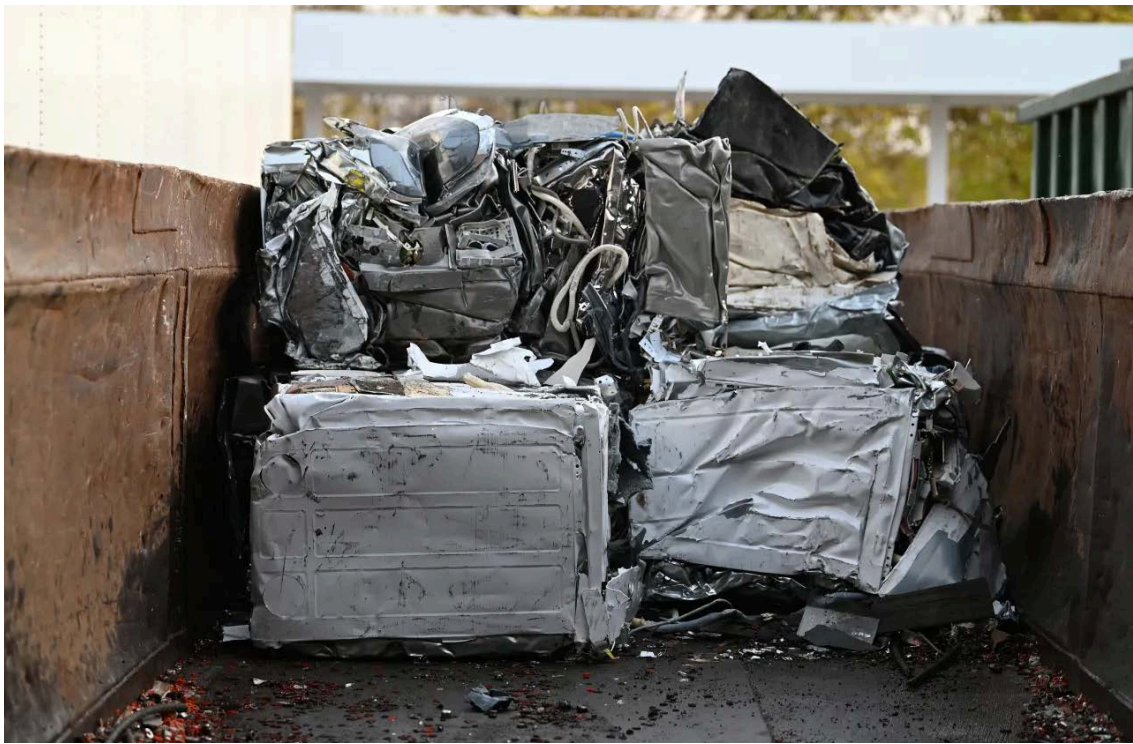
Bob Taylor, Abt's head of operations and construction manager, said the Megapack takes power from the solar system and stores energy inside the battery. Abt can use this as backup power for the Recycling Center if there is an outage.

According to Taylor, it also acts as frequency regulation. The battery stores power, and ComEd uses it as a capacitor for the grid.

ComEd sends signals to the battery to regulate frequency, sending and taking power from the battery as needed to maintain grid consistency.

ComEd pays Abt a fee, which helps pay off the battery sooner, and then the fee is profit to the company.

Via the Recycling Center, "We recycle 95% of the stuff that we use," Abt said.



Compacted recycled appliance material in Abt's recycling center in Glenview on Oct. 29, 2024. (Karie Angell Luc/Pioneer Press)

“And hardly anyone can say that and I wish every other business could see how we do things. They’d save money and they’d be recycling.”

Abt also is one of just a few entities that recycles plastic foam, used for coffee cups, carryout food containers, packing material and insulation. At Abt, the material is melted in compact blocks that are manageable to lift. They’re then repurposed for uses such as making picture frames or building insulation applications.



Heated recycled styrofoam oozes to fill a frame to cool in Abt's recycling center in Glenview on Oct. 29, 2024. (Karie Angell Luc/Pioneer Press)

The company created the custom square frames for the melted styrofoam to cool in blocks, “because they stack nicely,” on skids, Abt said.

Abt opened its Glenview location on May 26, 2002, according to its website, after previously owning stores in Logan Square, Niles and Morton Grove. It has nearly 1,800 employees.



From left, in front of blocks of recycled styrofoam at Abt’s recycling center are Mike Abt, formerly of Glencoe, also Abt co-president, with Brian Thomson, co-president of Honey Lake Bee Company of North Barrington, on Oct. 29, 2024.

(Karie Angell Luc/Pioneer Press)

Abt said he likes the Glenview location.

“We have no neighbors and that makes it easy for the town to like us...the interstate (294), a hotel, there’s no one to complain.”

And now with the buzz about newcomer honey bees, “We make noise, but that’s the way it works,” Abt said.

“We’re a business.”