

Maryland Sheep & Wool Festival Gearing Up

W. FRIENDSHIP, Md. — One of the time-honored rites of spring — sheep shearing — will be demonstrated by one of the most skilled exponents of the art at the 15th annual Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival May 7 and 8 at the Howard County Fairgrounds, West Friendship, Md., when Charlie Swaim, Drakesville, Iowa, several times international shearing champion, will be on stage at various times both days. In addition he will judge shearing competitions. Novice competitors, those who have sheared 75 but not over 700 sheep in a lifetime, will compete at 6 p.m. Saturday, while professionals who have sheared over 700 sheep will show their skills at 11 a.m. Sunday.

The Festival, located off I-70 at exit 80, just west of Baltimore, includes sheep shows, educational seminars, crafts, entertainment in the form of music and dancing, good food, trade shows and contests involving both old and young in an annual celebration of the wonders of the miracle fiber, wool, and the animals who produce it. Sponsored by the Maryland Sheep Breeders Assoc. and chaired by Mary E.F. Streaker, the event is open to all free of charge and with ample free parking. Take Exit 80, go south on Rte. 32, then turn right on Rte. 144 to Fairgrounds.

Nearly 200 craftspeople and suppliers will be exhibiting, demonstrating and selling their wares, according to Ernie Hall, Keymar, crafts coordinator. This is the largest number ever recorded and they hail from 21 different

states, from Maine through Florida and as far west as Colorado and Utah, with midwest states sandwiched in between.

More than 500 sheep, bred for their wool, will be shown in shows featuring Border Leicester, Columbia, Corriedale, Romney, white wool and natural colored. In addition, more than 30 breeds, representing dual purpose, meat, wool and exotic breeds, will be displayed in separate quarters. Their owners will be on hand to discuss their merits. Eleven breed organizations will have booths explaining the attributes of their sheep. Three county organizations will have booths.

Feeder lambs to grow out for the future will be shown and sold Saturday. A carcass contest is scheduled, with the champion and reserve champion lambs to be awarded lucky raffle ticket holders.

Always a crowd pleaser is the sheep to shawl contest, which this year will pit 11 teams against each other and the clock. One team will feature male personnel. Each team consists of a shearer, 3 spinners and a weaver. The sheep is shorn and wool given to the spinners who treadle as fast and evenly as they are able. The yarn then goes to the weaver who creates a shawl to specific dimensions within a 3-hour time limit, beginning at 9:30 a.m. Saturday. Shawls are judged, awarded ribbons and cash prizes and are sold at auction. The auctioneer will remind the gentlemen that this is a rare opportunity to buy their ladies "one of a kind" items.

Some festival goers wouldn't think it complete without witnessing the expertise of Border Collies herding sheep. They won't be disappointed, for Nathan Mooney, Carlisle, PA, will put his talented dogs through their paces both days.

Food is an important part of any gathering and the festival will offer many kinds of dishes, from sandwiches to gourmet lamb. Several restaurants will be selling food in the food building, which also will house the lamb cook-off contest and lamb cutting demonstrations. There will be food booths throughout the grounds. Coupons for redemption in certain markets for fresh American lamb will be distributed. Fundings for the lamb promotion is provided by the American Sheep Producers Council, Maryland Sheep Breeders Assoc. and partially by the Virginia Sheep Federation. Giant Food and other retailers are cooperating.

A lamb and wool queen will be crowned Saturday and will reign for the year over many sheep-related events. Other events include skein and garment competition, fine arts, photo and poster contests, shepherd's lead, fashion show, square dancing, junior spinning and 4-H, FFA judging.

An important auction will take place at 3 p.m. Sunday when breeding rams and ewes will be sold. These animals will have been shown and evaluated by the judge. Only rams grading blue will sell, while ewes grading blue and red will be offered. Jack Price, 339 Lemmon Rd., Westminster, Md.

21157, is sale manager. Phone 301-848-8097. Sale catalogs are available. Sheep shows coordinator is Donald Scaling II, 7524 Gaither Rd., Sykesville, Md. 21784. Phone 301-795-6955.

Festival visitors look to suppliers for raw materials to take home with which to fashion their own garments or products. Paramount is the offering of many kinds of fleeces. Both natural colored and white fleeces of grades from the finest to the coarsest may be purchased at the fleece barn. Fleeces may be consigned for sale or entered in competition and placed for sale at producer's option. They will be judged Saturday morning and go on sale at 1 p.m.

While the festival is intended to be fun and entertaining, it is also designed to provide education on various subjects through seminars. Dr. Scott Barao, extension livestock specialist, University of Maryland, will begin the sessions at 7 p.m. Friday, May 6. He will discuss reasons for and usefulness of good record keeping in the sheep flock; minimum records and methods of collection, on the farm computerization of flock records, software available, and the new national sheep improvement program.

If you've always wanted to try your hand at spinning here's your chance. West Friendship 4-H club members will conduct a "drop in, learn to spin" from 12:30 to 2 p.m. Sunday.

"We are fortunate to have two experts on fleece selection and pre-

paration and knitting," states Mrs. Streaker, chairman. Caye Speakman, who holds a degree in crafts from the University of Maryland and a master weaver rating will talk about what to look for in a fleece, different methods of preparation for spinning and demonstrate techniques of spinning at 1 p.m. Sunday. Mrs. Speakman has taught in the area for 15 years, is past president of Potomac Craftsmen and charter member of both Arachne Spinners and Moonspinners.

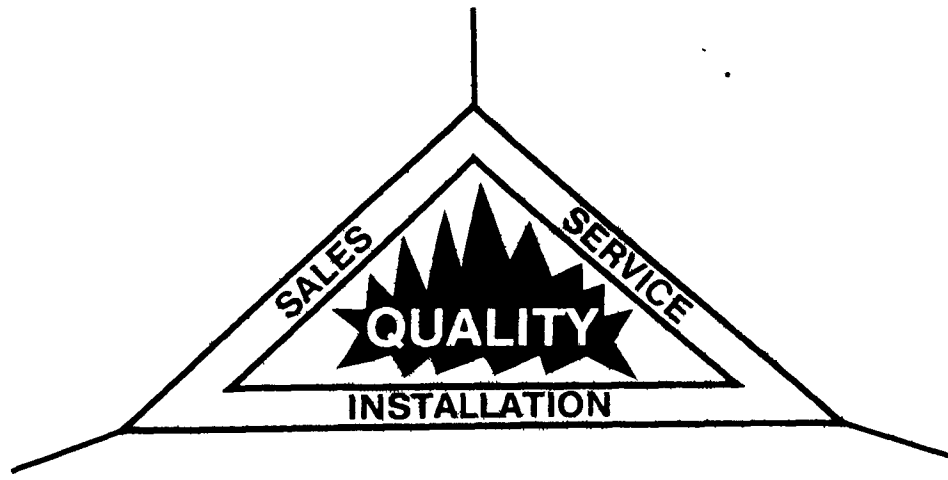
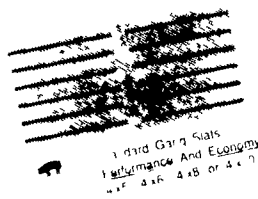
Hands on Knitting will be taught at 3 p.m. Sunday by Beth Brown Reinsel. She is a teacher, designer, writer and most recently, organizer of the Harford County chapter of the Knitting Guild of America. She chairs the national guild committee for professional designers and teaches knitting, spinning and dyeing at Harford Community College as well as in her own studio. Bring size 7 or 8 needles and 2 or 3 colors of worsted weight yarn for this course.

On-going both days in the information tent will be a video show on fiber working techniques.

Of great interest will be a slide presentation of sheep of the USSR presented by Peter Hagerty, Maine sheep farmer and originator of the peace fleece. He will discuss breeds of sheep raised in the Soviet Union and relate his experiences concerning his negotiations for the purchase of Russian wool, which he combines with American wool for "peace fleece". Both yarns and patterns or instructions for finished garments are merchandised in both countries.

Additional information may be obtained by calling 301-321-1344 or 301-845-8744.

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