

# Kids' KOrner

## Father-Son Bonding Happens At Old Oley Farm

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OLEY (Berks Co.) — William Willits III shares more than the same name with his father — William Willits II. The 12-year-old, nicknamed Sandy, and his father spend many hours in the sheep barn.

"I learned about lambing before I was walking," Sandy joked as he told about sleeping in the barn with his dad during lambing season.

The Willits, who live on a 25-acre farm in Oley, raise 50 Dorsets. Seven of the home bred Dorsets will ride in the Willits' newly purchased truck for Pennsylvania Farm Show competition that begins this week.

"We had to get a bigger truck to pull the trailer," the elder Willits said.

As father and son discuss Farm Show preparations, excitement edges their voices.

"I hope we can wash the sheep at home before we go," Sandy said.

The farm is set up with a big blow dryer for livestock, but the Willits don't like to expose the sheep to water unless the outside weather is 30 to 45 degrees.

It's been much too cold, at least when this article was written. So the Willits will need to wait their turn at the Farm Show Complex where water and dryers are available for exhibitors.

The Willits use Ivory Snow and No Tears shampoo around the face to prevent irritated the eyes.

The elder Willits is the leader for about 30 members of the Berks County 4-H Sheep Club.

Having a father for a 4-H leader has its advantages, according to Sandy.

"I don't miss any of the shows because he reminds me," he said.

Because Willits is a leader, he usually takes two to three weeks vacation from his job as a computer program to attend 4-H activities.

The lambing pens are ready for the lambing season that is expected this week. It may require the elder Willits to skip some of the Farm Show activity and stay home to check on ewes. If not, Lavery, Sandy's stepmom, is in charge. She said that she doesn't lose any sleep

when she is in charge because she believes in letting Mother Nature take her course.

She does check the flock before bedtime and dries the newly-born lambs in the morning.

The main concern is to make sure the ewe is a good mother and does not reject the lamb.

The Willits had no birthing deaths last year. They attribute the high birth rate to well-fed sheep that get plenty of minerals.

When fair and Farm Show season arrives, Sandy cheers about three things:

- Going to the shows
- Getting out of school
- Getting prize money.

This year, Sandy has another achievement to celebrate. He has been one of the 20 junior 4-H'ers selected to participate in the Junior Shepherds Contest.

Judging is based on a one hour blocking contest, wool judging, equipment identification, sheep judging, feed identification, and a 20-question quiz.

In addition to the state Farm Show, the Willits' fair circuit includes Reading, Oley, Kutztown, and Allentown.

"My best show ever was the Oley Fair this year," Sandy said. There, he showed the grand champion ewe and was named champion fitter.

In addition to breeding sheep, Sandy raises some market lambs that he keeps in shape by running them back and forth on a platform built outside the barn.

Sheep names are chosen by how a sheep acts or appears. Included in the entourage of sheep are names such as Zip and Zap, Bottle Babies, Mikey and Harold, and Zeus.

Some sheep become a bit spoiled and Sandy admits to becoming too attached to a few when it comes to selling the market lambs. "But some of the others, I'm glad to be rid of," Sandy said.

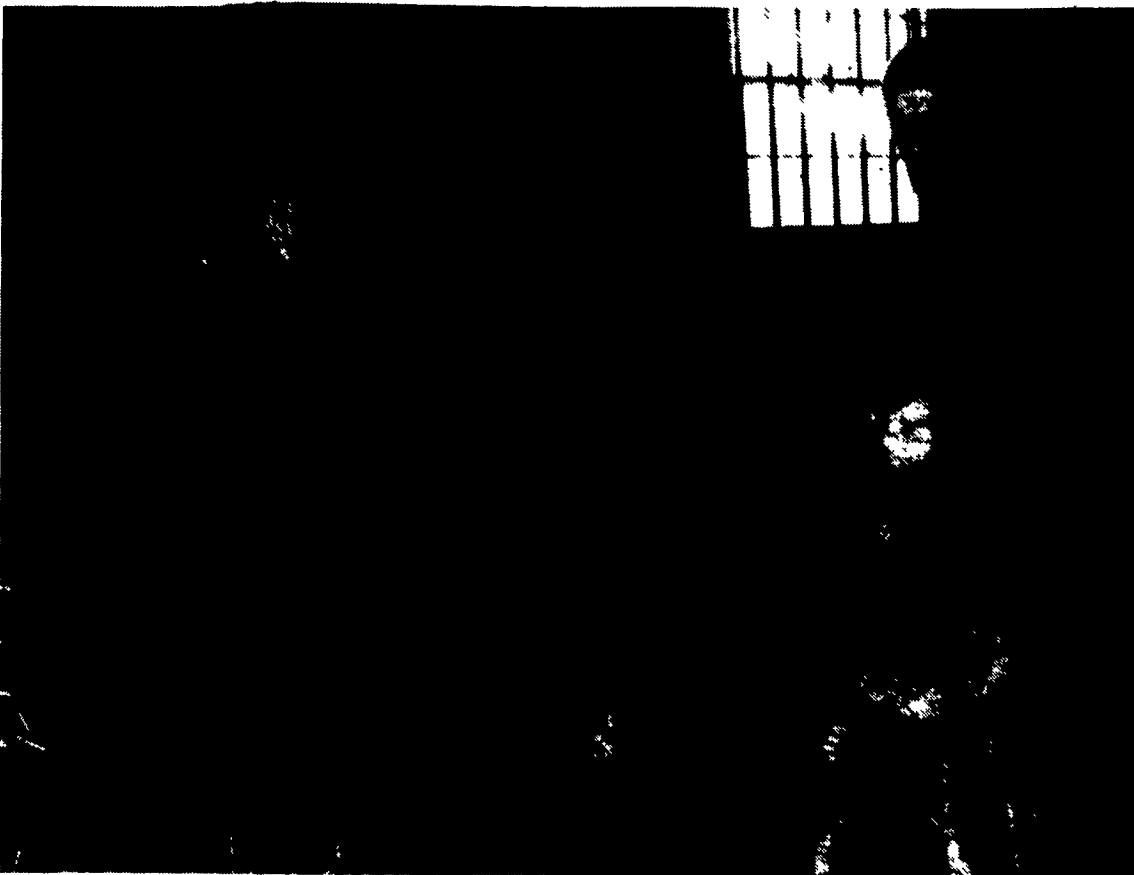
He finds it frustrating when a sheep refuses to cooperate during a show.

"You can do good in a show, and then you make one mistake because of a bad day from an animal," Sandy said.

One lamb follow Lavery around the yard as she worked in the flow-



This gang standing in front of the Willits' barn is eager for Farm Show competition. From left, Jane Renner (Sandy's mother), Sandy, William II, and Lavery.



These are some of the 50 Dorsets the Willits raise on their farm in Berks County. William Willits III, nicknamed Sandy, and his father spend a lot of time in the sheep barn.

er beds, but the lamb needed to be curtailed when she began eating more than grass.

Sandy's mother, Jane Renner, lives nearby and often helps with transportation to shows and other details.

Sandy is a seventh grader at the Oley Middle School. Next summer, Sandy will participate as a People-to-People Ambassador for a three-week educational trip to Australia and New Zealand. About 20 students from Berks County will participate in the program that is slanted toward science education and includes a marine biology dive. Students are selected from interest and achievement in science.

Sandy is hoping to survey sheep and cattle ranching during his trip

to Australia and New Zealand, where sheep numbers are profuse.

Prize money from Farm Show standings will go toward the \$800 needed for his New Zealand and Australian trip.

Sandy enjoys playing football, basketball, and baseball.

"I like to be active outside, but I also like to read," he said.

Sandy's dad said that he thinks sheep raising offers a great opportunity for father and son to be together. He was raised on a Chester County beef farm and received bachelor's and master's degrees in animal science and ag education. He works as a computer manager and yearns to be in agriculture. That's why he started raising sheep about 20 years ago. At first, he started with crossbreeds, then

switched to Dorsets because they can be bred twice annually and out of season.

The family lives on the 1850 Old Oley Farm that has been in Lavery's family since 1952. It's a picture-perfect farm with a spacious stone house. Sheep graze among the tall, whispering pine trees and split rail fences line the property.

A miniature donkey named Max, a pony named Paso Fino, two steers, a dog, and several cats take up animal residency in the barn.

Sandy is raising the steers for another 4-H project.

The father and son are especially happy to attend the Farm Show this year because they missed it last year when the elder Willits was hospitalized.



Sandy, William II, and Lavery review the rules for the Junior Shepherds Contest in which Sandy was selected to compete.