

From Sheep to Snowmen At Shady Pines Farm

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FELTON (York Co.) —
 Fleeces grow long through this December cold on the backs of the two dozen Border Leicester sheep grazing the hillside pasture at Shady Pines Farm.

But none of the fleece is longer or more lustrous than that forming the full, curly beard on the paper-mache and bisque face of a large Victorian Santa welcoming visitors to Shady Pines' own wool shop.

The shop is located near Felton, in the lovely old farm home of the Mancuso family, Debbie and husband, Pat, and daughters Janelle, 18, and Melissa, 16. It showcases an array of items created by Debbie and her talented friends from the raw wool of the flock.

Victorian Santas, with their lush, thick beards of raw wool, are only one of several Christmas creations featured by Debbie during her holiday-season hours at the shop. She crafts her Santas in a variety of sizes, each with its own personal look and hand-crafted facial features, using a technique of applying a bisque finish over a paper-mache base. Various sizes of wooden Santas, each sporting a full, curly beard of wool, also peer out from points around the cozy shop.

Another popular seasonal seller is Debbie's collection of whimsical snowmen fashioned from graduated sizes of white balls of wool. And, in a display hutch nearby, halo-topped angels appear to almost float on their flowing robes crafted from fluffy, carded wool sparkling with a dusting of gold sprinkles.

The shop is tastefully done in a rustic look, with baskets and crates filled to overflowing with fat skeins of yarn hand-dyed by Debbie in a rainbow of rich colors. Wool and related products are attractively displayed in every nook and cranny. Even a framed lithograph on the wall depicts



Elegant in long, curly-wool beard and green-velvet robe trimmed in fur, this 40-inch tall Victorian Santa greets visitors to Shady Pines Farm's wool shop. Debbie Mancuso crafts the one-of-a-kind Christmas figures and accessorized this St. Nick with his satin mittens around a gnarled wooden walking stick and gold toy pack brimming with miniature gifts and a tiny doll.

sheep.

Her variety of hand-crafted sweaters include unique designs, like those featuring kittens or dogs, and one style done by computerized knitting machine in an intricate pattern of interwoven sheep-shapes. Hats, scarves, mittens, socks, crocheted wool hair bows, and warm slippers of felted wool are tastefully displayed with cuddly, stuffed toy sheep, miniature hobby horses sporting curly-wool manes, yarn dyes, and items for the spinner.

There is even a welcoming committee of sorts in the form of the Mancuso's pet Border Collie, Mandy, who greets visitors at the end of the walk, tail wagging in an effort to "herd" them toward the shop's front door.

Shady Pines Farm's shop is an outgrowth of a commitment by the Mancuso family toward helping others, not just during the holiday season, but year-round. Debbie became interested in sheep several years ago, but the family's home included just an acre of land and lacked the space for a flock. When they moved to their ten-acre farm near Felton, with plenty of barn and pasture space, her dream of raising sheep became reality.

"If it weren't for the people we've met in the sheep business, we would be nowhere," Debbie says in praise of the support system of other local wool producers and crafters. "We must share what we do as an industry; I don't want to lose that."

"We want to be an active member of the community," affirms Debbie, who assists with educational events at local schools, gives sheep-related demonstrations and, during the Christmas season, often has sheep starring in local live-nativity presentations.

With a dedication to sharing the experience of animals and farm life with others, she has become involved in outreach efforts of the York Helping Hands for the Homeless organization.

To help raise funds for the non-profit York Helping Hands, Shady Pines Farm annually sponsors a Fun Festival at the farm, featuring educational activities like sheep shearing and country-related games. Participants at the annual mid-September festival on the farm enjoy seasonal activities, stuffing scarecrows and painting pumpkins. York Wildlife organization has presented programs on owls and birds, and members of the 4-H Seeing Eye Puppy club have given demonstrations with their project dogs.

"The shop exists to help support maintaining the sheep, so we have them here to share with others," Debbie explains. "It helps to cover the expenses of feed and caring for them."

Every year on the first weekend in May, much of the shop's inventory is packed up and hauled south to Maryland's Howard County Fairgrounds for the state's popular Sheep and Wool Festival. Debbie has been a participant in the noted regional shepherding and craft show for several years. In fact,



Lambs from the Mancuso's flock of Border Leicesters nibble at the treat of grain Debbie offers them.



Debbie crafts her popular Christmas-season snowmen from balls of white wool.

when the shop closes from regular hours after the holidays, she immediately goes to work replenishing her inventory of wool-crafted items in preparation for the thousands of visitors that annually flock to the Maryland festival.

In addition to the sheep, Shady Pines is home to a few horses, one donkey, and four dogs. A devoted animal lover, Debbie works part-time at the Seven Valleys Animal Hospital, in addition to looking after the Mancuso's own barnyard residents and keeping her shop filled with warm and wooly gifts.

Shady Pines Farm and shop is located at R1, Box 12637 Mt. Olivet Rd., 17322, approximately 10 minutes from Exit 1 of Interstate 83. For more information, Debbie Mancuso may be contacted at (717) 244-8353.



Angels fashioned by Debbie are delicate and fragile in appearance but made of rugged, durable carded wool.

DOMESTEAD NOTES

