

# Llamas 'Llight' Their 'Llives'

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**SCHAEFFERSTOWN** (Lebanon Co.) — "We've put a lot of time and training into them," said Judy Eberly. "They're special characters."

At Juben Hill Llamas, Ben and Eberly not only care for their own llamas, but they are also active participants in several llama organizations and produce and promote llama wool.

The Eberlys own a breeding farm of 25 llamas on their seven-acre farm. "We've always had horses, that's why we bought the farm, because we needed more room," said Eberly.

The couple bought two male llamas for pets the year after they moved in. When the Eberlys discovered "how wonderful the fiber is," they expanded to their current breeding program.

The Eberlys are actively involved in "Llama And Fiber Friends," (LAFF), a group from Berks, Lebanon, and Lancaster counties which come together to do wool projects. They are also involved with the Eastern Llama and Alpaca Festival (ELAF), a festival conducted in April at the Lebanon Fairgrounds.



**This matching mother-and-daughter pair, "Shelly" and "Rachel," are "two peas in a pod," according to Eberly.**

Preferring natural colors for the colors of her wool, Eberly uses the unlikely source of sugar free Kool-Aid to get the "lovely pastel colors" she looks for. "Any mother that has a child knows how enduring Kool-Aid stains can be," said Eberly. "And it smells good besides."

The Eberlys shear their llamas

bers to shrink and adhere to each other. "It can be compared to throwing a wool sweater in the washer and dryer," said Eberly. The shrunken fibers make up the dense felt fabric.

Another method of making felt is layering the fabric on bamboo and flattening it with a rolling pin motion in hot soapy water to end up with the desired shrunken fibers. Eberly notes that a crocheted or knitted piece can be put into a washing machine and agitated to shrink into felt.

This past year one of her big projects included making a panel of llama felt for a several-paneled "yurt," or circular, domed tent traditionally used by pastoral peoples of Asia. This particular llama-felt yurt was showcased at a conference in Vermont and will travel to other llama activities throughout the nation, according to Eberly.

The panel was made by rolling layers of felt in bamboo screen. The LAFF group produced the llama design by placing pieces of felt on the panel. Using a barbed needle, the felt was needle-punched together. The group donated the panel to raise money

for the llama conference. Eberly, an artist with a studio on the farm, designed the panel.

Llamas are not just wool-producers at Juben Hill Llamas, however. Their personable dispositions and easy maintenance makes them an asset to the farm. "Llamas are easy to care for," she said. "They eat a small amount of food because they have very thorough digestive systems." Their thorough systems yield the small amounts of odorless "llama beans," which make ideal fertilizer, according to Eberly.

The animals are basically browsers and survive on pasture grass and specially made, locally available llama grain.

The gestation period for a llama is 11½ months, and twins are uncommon.

Color does not traditionally have a bearing on the value of an animal. The first thing Eberly looks for is conformation. "We also look at the breeding background, what quality they come out of, if the mother was a good mother," said Eberly.

Each llama grows its own dis-

tinct coat, from long and silky to shorter, thicker, and more fluffy wool. "One is not better than the other, it depends what you want to use it for," said Eberly. "The finer wool has a crimp to it and may spin better, but the coarser guard hair, which protects the underwool, is a strong hair used for rugs or outer garments." These guard hairs, according to Eberly, are readily identifiable and can be pulled out of the cleaner underwool.

A heavy wool coat means that llamas love the cold weather, said Eberly.

"Temperament varies a lot, but they're generally gentle and curious. All have very distinct personalities. They're very leery of strangers. You have to prove to them that you're trustworthy."

The males are also mild mannered and are only separated to control breeding.

"We do a drill team routine to Elton John's 'Can You Feel The Love,'" said Eberly. "It kind of says how we feel about our animals."



**"Quechee" checks out the handmade felted llama panel made by the LAFF group and held by Kay Schotta, Lititz, and Judy Eberly. The panel is made entirely with handmade llama felt. Some of the felt pieces have long pieces of fiber that were left hanging loose to give the llama real-life look. Eberly also designed the panel.**

In addition the couple is members of the Greater Appalachian Llama Association and go to llama conferences every year. Much of the fund-raising efforts of the groups, said Eberly, goes to llama medical, behavioral, and fiber research.

Eberly also participates on a 12-16 member drill team, a precision marching team that performs choreographed routines to musical selections. The group has performed at the llama and alpaca festival in addition to Hershey Park for the past two years and annual appearances at the Unionville Fair.

The Eberlys' llamas travel to churches, libraries, social get-togethers, harvest festivals, schools, and small local fairs.

Wool is an important part of the Eberly's llama business. Judy not only processes the wool but conducts spinning demonstrations at harvest festivals and schools "to teach children about fiber and animals."

"It's actually considered to be warmer than sheep wool," she said. The wool is also noted for its softness.

She believes that llama wool is easier to handle than sheep wool because it is lanolin-free. "It's not oily. It's a very dry, soft wool."

during spring. Shearing, which takes approximately one hour per animal, yields two to three pounds of wool per llama. Many farms do hand processing, according to Eberly.

The on-farm processing involves shearing, washing, carding, and spinning. "The fiber can be warm, knitted, or crocheted, anything you would use high-quality yarn for," said Eberly.

Yarn, wool, garments, and even lead ropes are made from llama wool.

Eberly makes extensive use of llama felt, another use of wool, in her projects. The felt may be used to make hats, large hanging panels, blankets, and rugs. "Felted fiber has gone on for hundreds of years. It's really using old techniques to make the felted objects," she said. Hats, booties, mittens, and gloves are made from llama felt.

"It's probably not a matter of having the market but having the time to make the felt," said Eberly.

Eberly uses several felt-making procedures. One method of making the fabric includes placing layers of felt on a screening in different directions, and, along with the addition of hot, soapy water, rubbing the fibers in a circular motion. This causes the fi-



**A heavy wool coat means that llamas love the cold weather, said Eberly.**



**The Eberlys spend ample time working with the friendly animals. "They really soon learn who they can trust and who will take care of them," said Eberly.**