

# Never A Dull Moment For Lutz Family At Conicville Ostrich



Willard and Lorna Lutz, owners of Conicville Ostrich, Mount Jackson, Va., pose at their Virginia Century Farm sign located along Senedo Road (Rt. 42).

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**MOUNT JACKSON** (Shenandoah Co., Va.) — On the Virginia Century Farm of fifth generation owners Willard and Lorna Lutz, a guest and the couple, themselves, watched a female ostrich using her beak to roll an egg on the ground. They approached her on a sort of runway situated in the center, with high fences separating ostrich pens on the left and those of the smaller emus on the right.

Aligning his movements to those of the people, a big male ostrich inside the fence trotted along, ready to protect a harem of females with a lightening strike of his awesome beak, if the intruders threatened to come too close.

When the danger passed, Lorna said, "Watch, he will dance for you."

Sure enough, with ruffled feathers lilted every which way, elongated neck undulating left and right and legs in the dirt, the great bird performed a fascinating and amorous routine.

Then a companionable, coal black goat sporting gray horns, exercised his right to join the people, but instinctively began to nibble at the black shoulder bag and dark linen jacket the guest had on, obviously, pleased with an array of unexpected dietary supplements he could easily reach.

In 1995, the Lutzs were already living on the land that,



Willard Lutz holds an ostrich hide that is in the drying process — packed in salt after the fat is removed and preparatory to being shipped away for tanning.

after emigrating from Germany, Willards great-grandfather had acquired in the Shenandoah Valley. That's when they decided to go for the long jump and start an ostrich business. Getting Conicville Ostrich off the ground wasn't easy for Willard, who retired from having been a dentist with the Harrisonburg/Rockingham Health Department, and Lorna, a Shenandoah County elementary school teacher,

who agreed to remain on the substitute roster after resigning the full-time position.

"Money was the challenge," said Willard about the early experience.

It turned out they lost big bucks upon the purchase of their first breeder pair ordered from Texas. The lesson was a hard one. In Orange County Virginia, however, the same year they bought a second breeder pair close to home, their success improved.

Despite the difficulties, they retained a determination that was owing to the conviction that ostrich is a lean, healthier meat choice and a worthwhile small enterprise.

They soon realized when they attempted to gather helpful information and advice from an ostrich organization, that support was not there. They were on their own.

Willard said Conicville Ostrich is one of a handful of similar operations in the state of Virginia and reports that Texas and Oklahoma are the main hubs for ostrich farms.



A female ostrich rolls her egg on the ground at Conicville Ostrich, Mount Jackson, Va.

By and large the pursuit got off the ground and now is starting to pay for itself.

These days at appropriate times they hitch the livestock trailer to the truck and tow it to Somerset, Pa. where the LaRue Meat Processing folks slaughter the birds.

En route there, however, curious travelers slowing down to get a better look generally create a slowdown of traffic. Instead of continuing on their way, the travelers stay abreast longer than they should to observe the long-necked creatures.

"Traveling on the interstate, the ostriches stick their heads out the side of the trailer," said Lorna. "Traffic will back up to see what on earth is sticking out its head out of the trailer."

The valuable hide is professionally removed at LaRues and the meat is also processed.

Back at the farm, the fat is rendered after Willard takes it off the hide. The fat is valuable in producing lotions, soaps, and oils. Until ready to ship to a tannery in Iowa, the hides stay packed in salt for two or three weeks. The



Lorna Lutz, left, of Conicville Ostrich, chats with Lynn St. Clair of Swover Creek Farms about the Shenandoah Alternative Farmers Exchange (SAFE). In February, SAFE was awarded a grant that St. Clair applied for in behalf of the three farms comprising the exchange. Working cooperatively, they are going to direct-market their own fresh meats, poultry, vegetables, and small fruits both at home and at farmers markets.

leather is shipped to Missouri and someone fills the order for various items the Lutzs want made from it.

Lorna waxes creative with the

eggs and feathers visible in the handcrafts scattered throughout the house, along with numerous leather items and by-products, all within easy reach.

The teal green emu eggs resemble ready-made Easter eggs, but considerably smaller than the cream-colored counterparts laid by the ostrich. Lorna said as you

drill into an emu egg, it gets lighter and lighter.

Keeping both emus and ostriches enable the Lutzs to educate visitors who come to them for tours. They can see distinct differences in the two species.

The laying chickens they keep provide eggs to sell and their turkeys are ready at holiday time.

With a good deal of pride, they point out a patch of blackberries

that Willards forebears planted 40 years ago. The stalks continue their annual fruit-bearing.

The markets and shows Lutzs go to in Woodstock, Staunton, and Charlottesville open on March 30 and run through December. Lorna says, in fact, before the season ends for the markets, their fruits and vegetables will already have run out. They grow snow peas, onions, raspberries, blackberries, asparagus, and corn, besides all manner of ostrich meat and products.

Their goal for connecting to customers in person is to acquaint people with the source of their food and to provide the assurance there are no additives (Lutzs have applied for organic certification) in what they are selling.

In maintaining and expanding this mission, with two other farms in the area, they have organized the Shenandoah Alternative Farmers Exchange (SAFE) to market their products together. For instance, at separate venues this year, while someone will be holding down one fort and selling all their products in a single location, another will be doing the same thing somewhere else.

People are welcome to visit the Conicville Ostrich farm by making an appointment for a tour. Call the Lutzs at (540) 477-3574 or visit [www.conicvilleostrich.com](http://www.conicvilleostrich.com) on the internet.



Willard Lutz models the ostrich leather boots and Lorna, his wife, the ostrich leather shoes.

## Satellite Conference On Cancer April 4

**UNIVERSITY PARK** (Centre Co.) — On Thursday, April 4, from 1 p.m.-3 p.m., Penn State Cooperative Extension in collaboration with the Appalachia Cancer Network, will host a national satellite conference entitled, "Environment and Breast Cancer: Education for Change."

The program is a project of Cornell University's Program on Breast Cancer and Environ-

mental Risk Factors (BCERF) and is targeted for those working with women, girls, families, and communities to teach the connections between health and environment, the need to be physically active and to eat healthily, to limit exposure to environmental chemicals, and to integrate breast cancer risk reduction education into health screening.

The conference will include

four national speakers and feature the newly released BCERF Tool Kit, which contains practical breast cancer risk reduction messages that can and should be integrated into the lives of real people.

Content areas include talking about pesticides in the home and neighborhood, chemicals in the home, helping rural women to adopt breast cancer risk reduc-

tion strategies, integrating breast cancer risk reduction messages into community health care and breast cancer screening settings, and working with preadolescent girls to strengthen leadership skills in modeling healthy behaviors for breast cancer risk reduction. Each module of the Tool Kit has been field-tested and evaluated and is designed to be integrated into existing community edu-

cation programs and will be available for on-site review. For more information on the BCERF Program at Cornell check their Website: at <http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/bcerf>.

The Program will be broadcast also at Penn State Cooperative Extension — Cumberland County.

Register by calling Marg Malehorn at (717) 240-6500.