

Gentlemen, Start Your Clippers

Judges Evaluate Shearing, Design, Weaving And Speed At Contest

MICHELLE KUNJAPPU
Lancaster Farming Staff

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — The Sale Arena buzzed with not only a large crowd but also the sound of whirring clippers — a sound that marked the beginning of the 20th annual Sheep to Shawl Contest Wednesday evening of Farm Show week.

Seven teams of five or six — a shearer, three spinners, a weaver and perhaps a carder — competed in the event.

After a shearer quickly clipped the sheep, the best of the wool was chosen by the rest of the team, who went to work carding, spinning, and weaving the seven shawls that were submitted to three judges for final placing.

Once the best of fleece is separated out, the team begins carding the wool. "Flicking" open the ends of the wool makes it easier to spin without catching, according to contestant Wini Labrecque.

Labrecque chooses the cleanest, longest locks out of the pile of wool at their feet.

"The same length locks makes spinning more consistent," Labrecque said. However, were she not in competition, "all of the fleece is usable except the wool with debris."

The Butler County Pedalers chose a Romney for the evening's contest, since "it has nice length to it and is soft and spins easily," said Labrecque.

After carding, the wool is spun and moves quickly to the weaving step, where the weavers carefully re-create the colors and patterns of a shawl already submitted to the contest and on display.

The look of the shawl may be inspired by nature, as in the example of the shawl created by the Butler County Pedalers, or by art, as in the Yorktowne Spinners' team shawl.

The creator of the Pedaler's shawl was inspired by a light snow dusted over the colors of fall leaves.

The dyed colors, according to the team's description, represented the leaves. The white and neutral tones of the wool were then reminiscent of the snow.

Kris Peters, weaver for the Yorktowne Spinners team, saw a Monet painting "and I thought, 'that's it,'" she said. "The way the colors blended" in the green-and-lavender painting of lilies motivated Peters to recreate the painting in the shawl.

Three judges evaluate criteria in five categories: shearing, spinning, design, weaving, and speed.

The shearer is judged on speed, lack of second cuts, and uniformity. The spinners are judged on not only individual but also group criteria, as the spinning should relate to the design of the shawl. Members attempted to spin evenly to produce a uniform product.

The design of the shawl counts for a substantial percentage of the team's score, as judges consider design originality, weave difficulty, softness, and finished fringe. Judges also look at color coordination between warp (the yarns lengthwise in a loom) and weft (wool yarn interlaced by the weaver into the already-positioned warp).

For the weaver, judges observe evenness in the weaving. They may probe the salvage edges for evenness. Speed was also on the weavers' minds, as points were awarded accordingly to when the team finished (first, second, etc.).

Also during the contest, spinning and weaving demonstrations were conducted by the Lancaster Spinners and Weavers Guild. A fashion show of woolen products, including shawls, sweaters, hats, and jackets also entertained the audience as the teams worked.

The Pennsylvania Lamb and Wool Queen, Amber Shollenberger, and her court spoke about the commonwealth's sheep and wool industry.

Additional awards were as follows: shearer award, Nate Good; fleece award, Butler County Pedalers; team's choice, Kittens in a Basket; weaver's award, Wini Labrecque; and premium spinning group, Penn Wheels.

The shawls were auctioned off at the end of the contest.

Overall, first place went to Yorktowne Spinners, York County. The shawl brought \$1,600 and was sold to Jan Frushone Gibas, who works at the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Dog Law Enforcement.

According to extension leader and 4-H leader Linda Spahr, the team will donate a portion of the sale to the York County 4-H Fiber Club. The club, begun last year, spent the first year learning "how to produce a good fleece and take care of the animal producing it," said Spahr.

However this year 4-H members may get some hands-on experience as Spahr is hoping to purchase small looms. "Kids are getting very interested in weaving and using looms," she said. "We'll probably buy hand looms that the kids could take home and learn how to make socks or scarves."

Second place went to Penn Wheels, Bucks County. The shawl sold for \$400. Kittens in a Basket, Bradford County, took third place and sold their shawl for \$325. Fourth place went to Carl and the Not-So-Lazy Kates,



Pictured are, from left, Yorktowne Spinners weaver Kris Peters, Pennsylvania Lamb and Wool Queen Amber Shollenberger, spinner Leslie Orndorf, Jan Frushone Gibas, who purchased the shawl, shearer Nate Good, spinner Greta Dise, spinner Sandy Britcher, and (former) secretary of agriculture Sam Hayes.

who sold their shawl for \$950. The fifth place shawl, bringing \$650, was made by Butler County Pedalers. Sixth place winners, Eweniquely 60 Percent Man

Made, sold their shawl for \$500. The seventh place shawl sold for \$375 and was made by the Fleece To Shuttle team.



Marlesa Coolbaugh, Canton, part of Bradford County's "Kittens in a Basket" team, worked against the clock to finish the shawl during the competition.



Team "Kittens in a Basket" put the finishing touches on the shawl by cutting the fringes.



Nate Good, Windsor, did a repeat performance as he again captured the shearer's award.



Kristen Brumbach, Dover, helped to model wool products during the evening's wool fashion show.



Nate Good, Windsor, and Sandra Britcher, Airville, are both part of the winning Yorktowne Spinners group.



Wini Labrecque, Cabot, Butler County, works at "flicking" locks of wool to open the ends, which "makes it easier to spin without catching," said Labrecque.



Susan Lightner, Harrisville, part of Butler County's "Fleece To Shuttle" group, pulls out fiber for the turning wheel to "draw it to the width I want it to be," she said.