

Alpaca ranch is sustainable lifestyle for couple

By Jodi Schneider
Correspondent

Driving up to Alpaca Country Estates Ranch and Bed & Breakfast in Terrebonne, you can see pastures speckled with grazing alpacas. From a distance the animals might be mistaken for llamas or strangely colored deer, but up close, you can't help but marvel at their elegant necks, charming underbites, well-coiffed wavy hairdos, and bushy backsides.

But they're not just intriguing creatures; they're how Art Izer and his wife, Nancy Chapel-Izer, make a living. They are a full-fledged farm-to-fiber operation.

Alpacas could be the greenest animals on the planet. Down to the fact their hooves are softly padded which reduces environmental impact, alpacas produce more fleece than sheep and they have more effective eating and drinking habits than other grazing animals, which also reduces impact. They are indigenous to the harsh conditions of the Peruvian Andes, and the fact that these animals are not harmed during the shearing process means that

they are highly sustainable.

Alpacas produce some of the finest natural fibers in the world, providing communities with great clothing. Plus, they're the perfect alternative to lawnmowers.

"We use their fiber and their manure," Chapel-Izer said. "We have 100 acres where we grow our own hay using alpaca fertilizer."

Their herd, which began with the purchase of six Huacaya alpacas in 2006, has developed into a multi-faceted business supported by an alpaca herd now over 1,000 strong. But that's a number that fluctuates because of the breeding program in place to perfect the alpaca fibers.

"The decision of what to do with thousands of pounds of alpaca fiber resulted in creating a fiber business in addition to breeding top-notch alpacas," Chapel-Izer said.

The couple produces their own hay, fertilizer, and quilts and design alpaca clothing.

Art and Nancy met while square-dancing, and were married in 2016, after both losing loved ones in 2007.

"Art's background experience working with cattle and horses has really helped around the ranch,"

Chapel-Izer said.

The ranch includes a bed and breakfast, fashion design company, artistry classroom, alpaca yoga classes, and Magical Strands Alpaca Boutique.

Izer recently began a new hobby – traditional quilting using alpaca fiber to fill the quilts for warmth and durability. His unique quilts, ranging from baby-size quilts to king-size bed quilts, are sold in their boutique and online.

"We love working with the alpacas, they are so delightful, gentle and caring," Chapel-Izer said. We now have two B&Bs, and it's so much fun to meet the people.

Alpaca Country Estates also offers a unique way to relieve stress and anxiety — alpaca yoga.

Chapel-Izer noted, "We have the yoga classes right out in our nursery pasture with the moms and babies. It's a peaceful and wonderful experience."

While there may be a novelty aspect to alpaca yoga, there is evidence, from both research and practice, that shows that the animals can provide stress relief that could aid in a person's overall physical and mental well-being.

The Izers have hosted numerous tours to families, church groups, and women's groups, and are interested in giving more tours to elementary schools.

As a former educator who taught grade school for 40 years, Chapel-Izer understands the importance of nurturing the next generation of leaders.

The ranch has donated alpacas to local 4-H clubs and youth organizations, to support their goals of developing citizenship, leadership, responsibility and life skills of youth through experiential learning programs.

"I truly enjoy sharing knowledge with youth, as well as adults, about these amazing, gentle creatures. Art and I love working with folks who are interested in learning the ins and outs of beginning a hobby farm, or Future Farmers and 4-H students looking for a rewarding project," Chapel-Izer said.

In 2014 Chapel-Izer decided to turn alpaca fleece into a fashion design company, Magical Strands. And with an expert staff, they make breeding decisions and select the best alpacas from their herd for their fiber to



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER

Art Izer and Nancy Chapel-Izer.

create the softest yarn.

"The weavers create the designs and woven material from that fiber. We select alpacas of every color and use their natural tones/shades," Izer noted.

Magical Strands boutique offers a wide variety of blankets, ponchos, coats, jackets, shawls and scarves.

Alpaca Country Estates is open to the public for tours or longer stays at their bed and breakfast. Visit the alpaca ranch for an enjoyable, educational, hands-on experience in the 134-acre park-like setting.

For more information: www.alpacacountryestates.com

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