

Alpaca fiber processing could bring jobs to county

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

Cave Junction residents John and Christine Gardiner already breed Suri alpacas and sell clothing from alpaca fiber, shearing and cleaning the fiber on site.

Washing and processing alpaca fiber by hand isn't exactly an efficient process. But machines can clean much larger volumes of wool and fiber at a faster rate. The Gardiners have plans in the works to bring that technology from New Zealand to Southern Oregon.

The business will be called Siskiyou Fiber Mill, and it could employ several Josephine County residents within the year.

"We think a profitable business can be created washing alpaca fiber and getting it ready for spinning," said Christine Gardiner. "Here we are poised really on the cusp of a whole new American textile industry. The time is right for us to localize some of the production of clothing."

In early February, they attended a convention in New Zealand hosted by AgResearch to study the more efficient technology that's being used to process sheep wool.

Gardiner said AgResearch hosted a demonstration with a small-scale machine that washes sheep wool at about one kilogram per hour. It wasn't quite what they envisioned, but it was a starting point for what they plan to do in the states.

By contrast, the Gardiners observed a much larger scale processing machine called the Kiwi Scour that runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can wash 100 tons of sheep wool in one day — with one four-hour break per week to clean the machine.

"The plant was only five years old but I think the basic technology is many decades old," Gardiner said. "We got to see two ends of the spectrum as a way of helping us learn what we need to know to wash alpaca fiber at a commercial scale."

Gardiner said she's been taking courses from the Rogue Community College (RCC) small business entrepreneurial center in Kerby, working on a business plan.

Siskiyou Fiber Mill wouldn't be as large as the Kiwi Scour, but could use mid-size machines able to provide a manageable amount of fiber for the U.S. market.

Christine Gardiner estimated there are about 250,000 alpaca in the U.S., with Oregon, Washington and California making up some 30 percent of the market.

"My goal is to create four or five new jobs in the next 18 months," Gardiner said. "I'm not talking minimum-wage jobs either, they'd be better than that."

The technology for machines like the Kiwi Scour is not new, but alpaca production in the U.S. hasn't really taken off. Most are still small-scale, local entities where people are washing the alpaca fiber by hand.

It's all part of a larger movement to increase production of locally grown and made products. More and more farmers are raising alpacas not just for fiber, but for breeding, pasture control and even manure.

The Gardiners sell what they call 'Paca-poo,' manure made from alpaca waste and straw as natural fertilizer for plants.

"We're thinking about tailoring existing technology to meet the economic needs of our time," Gardiner said. "It's really time for America to start re-thinking where our food comes from and thinking about the scales of our food production."

Christine Gardiner believes the technology for alpaca fiber production on a large scale could put life back into the U.S. textile market.

Gardiner also sees potential for the Siskiyou Fiber Mill to branch out into other jobs.

"We're looking at opportunities to partner with the RCC in the continuing education department to train people to work in the mill," Gardiner said. "They're

excited about a new industry in the county."

The starting goal for the Siskiyou Fiber Mill is to process 100,000 pounds of fiber per year. Most likely, it will be based in Grants Pass for its close proximity to Interstate 5.

"We can take raw fiber from Oregon, Washington and Idaho and turn it into partially-processed fiber; it's predictable, it's clean and it's high quality," Gardiner said. "It will stimulate other industries. People can spin it, felt it, they can make things from what our mill will produce. We can send it to another mill to be spun."

A striking element in the Gardiners' trip to New Zealand was

standing in areas of Christchurch that were turned to rubble in the earthquake nine days later.

"We were some of the last people to see Christchurch in all its glory," Gardiner said.

Gardiner added that she wishes for people to continue to keep the people of Christchurch and others affected by the earthquake in their hearts and minds.

"It was so close to the center of the historic district," Gardiner said. "We learned a lot of history there. The history of New Zealand and Oregon have some astonishing parallels, and the contrast was also fascinating to me."



(Photo by Dan Mancuso, Illinois Valley News)
John Gardiner helps Athena Demuth feed an alpaca Sept. 10, 2010 in Jubilee Park in Cave Junction

Local youth make cut for national art contest

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

Three Illinois Valley Boys and Girls Club members from all three area public schools had their artwork nominated for the National Fine Arts Exhibit.

Illinois Valley High School student Seth Hammersmith, along with Silas and Lilee Arias, the middle and elementary schools, respectively, are showcasing their work at the national level for the first time in IV Boys and Girls Club history.

IV club arts coordinator Summer Chatham said the contest was a great opportunity for kids interested in art to receive recognition for something they love to do.

"Lilee [Arias] has been coming into the art room for years," Chatham said. "Lilee and Silas turned in oil paintings and Seth [Hammersmith] has always been interested in art."

Local clubs in Phoenix, Talent, Grants Pass, White City and Shady Cove, Ore. all participate in the event.

According to IV Branch Manager Scott Thornhill, judges evaluate artwork at local-level exhibits, with the top finishers in each category moving to regional shows, then on to the national contest.

The contest, open to club members ages 6-18, aims to develop creativity and increase cultural awareness through art. Students can demonstrate their skills with monochromatic and multicolored drawing, mixed media, pastel, watercolor and print-making, to name a few.

Hammersmith's work involved stenciling an outline of his image from a projector, then using duct tape and oil paint as his mediums.

Chatham said students can submit work they've done outside school or the local club if someone working with them can certify it's their own work.

According to Chatham, the three winners are involved in several other Boys and Girls Club activities, such as sports, volunteering and community involvement, but through the art she saw a different aspect of their personalities.

"I love working with these three," Chatham said. "I had no idea they were so artistic and so talented...that's a side I don't get to see much of."

The winners themselves didn't brag about their art, instead staying humble amid the compliments from others. Hammersmith said his project was the result of a final in art class at the high school. Lilee Arias said her favorite thing about art was "making a mess."

"Silas [Arias] is more on the quiet side but awesome when you have him around," Chatham said. "Having him submit art...he has something to be excited about."

Chatham said she's fairly new in her role at the club, participating and volunteering since 2009. She hopes to become more acquainted with club members as time goes on so she learns their talents and personalities.

It's also possible that this contest has helped the young artists gain confidence in their own abilities. Chatham said boys and girls club members were no longer embarrassed to have others see their art.

"Some of them are [realizing], 'Oh, it's not embarrassing, nobody's going to make fun of me,'" Chatham said. "I've been seeing some of the transition."

In the future, Chatham said she and Thornhill hope to introduce more local judges for a community response to the art, not just those with a professional artist background.

Regional shows in March are judged in March and the national contest is scheduled for the month of June. National winners will have their work displayed in a virtual gallery.



(Photo by Darcy Wallace, Illinois Valley News)
Silas Arias, Lilee Arias and Seth Hammersmith from the Boys and Girls Club.

Mary B. Reynolds-Walter

Office: 592-6262 • Cell: 660-7342 • Fax: 592-6263
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Elementary School Lunch Menu
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THURSDAY, March 10

Fruit & yogurt parfait w/ graham crackers, turkey & cheese wrap, 3 cheese vegetable lasagna, totally teriyaki dippers w/ rice pilaf, cheesy burger on a multigrain bun

FRIDAY, March 11

Classic chef salad, very veggie sub sandwich, big beefy potato bowl, cheesy breadsticks w/ marinara sauce, hot ham & cheese sandwich

MONDAY, March 14

Hearty garden salad, super submarine sandwich, parmesan chicken & broccoli w/ pasta, baked cheese ravioli, cheesy burger on a multigrain bun

TUESDAY, March 15

Black bean salad, totally turkey sandwich on whole wheat bread, big chicken taco tuesday, RibBQ sandwich, baked potato bar w/ assorted toppings

WEDNESDAY, March 16

Minnie mouse salad, turkey & cream cheese pinwheels, sweet & sour chicken w/ pineapple rice, freshly baked cheese or pepperoni pizza, cheesy burger on a multigrain bun

In Celebration of
National Women's History Month

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ARTISTS HEALERS MUSICIANS

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This Week's Sudoku Puzzle Courtesy of

Illinois Valley News

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	2	4	3	8				
					6			7
	5	8				4		
4				1				
			7		5			
				2				8
		1				6	7	
3			5					
				4	9	2	1	

Solution on page B-3 © 2010 KrazyDad.com

HOW TO PLAY SUDOKU

1. Each of the numbers from 1 to 9 should only be placed once in each column.
2. Each number from 1 to 9 can be placed only once in each row.
3. The numbers 1 to 9 can appear only once in each 3x3 grid.

IVHS School Menu
Sponsored by

25647 Redwood Hwy.
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THURSDAY, March 10

Pasta with marinara/meat sauce or bean & cheese burritos, chicken burger or cheese burger, cheese, bbq chicken or supreme pizza, Italian turkey & cheese spicy chicken wrap, or chef, anti pasta or garden salads

FRIDAY, March 11

Nacho supreme, wiener wrap, corn dog, spicy chicken burger, cheeseburger; pepperoni, cheese, supreme or taco pizza; ham & cheese or turkey & cheese sandwich, turkey wrap; chef, garden or Mandarin chicken salad

MONDAY, March 14

Beef soft tacos, chicken strips, spicy chicken burger, hamburger; pepperoni, cheese, vegetarian or sausage pizza; ham & cheese or turkey & cheese sandwich, turkey wrap; chef, garden or Mandarin chicken salad

TUESDAY, March 15

Chicken fajitas, Rib-B-Que sandwich, chicken burger, cheeseburger; pepperoni, cheese or Hawaiian pizza; Italian or turkey & cheese sandwich, spicy chicken wrap; chef, antipasto or garden salad

WEDNESDAY, March 16

Taco salad, teriyaki beef rice bowl, spicy chicken burger, hamburger; pepperoni, sausage, cheese or Italian griller pizza; veggie or turkey & cheese sandwich, turkey wrap; chef, garden or Mandarin chicken salad