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Nancy Durst

A dream realized: Buxton woman starts one-of-a-kind alpaca farm specializing in selling geldings

By Colleen Marshall
Gazette Editor

It was love at first sight.

When Nancy Durst attended her first Open Farm Day, she looked into the eyes of an alpaca. The Buxton resident said that is all it took – she knew she was going to be an alpaca owner.

“When I saw my first alpaca, it was love at first sight,” she said. “It warmed my heart, and it had the most soulful eyes. I said right there, ‘One day I am going to have them.’”

Looking out over the vast acreage that make up her White Barn Meadows, Durst points out her dream realized. Alpacas sporting coats of all colors span her property, surrounded by rows of trees that soon will be bare.

Wide-eyed and curious, the herd moves closer to Durst as she addresses each one by name, before launching into a description of their personalities.

“They are my therapy,” she said. “I love to just stand here and muck, it’s just so calming. And, they make you laugh. What is better than that? You can’t help but

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laugh.”

Durst moves her head closer to one of the male alpacas, blowing gently in its face. He responds by looking her directly into her eyes, and...is that a smile? Durst keeps her hands at her side, explaining alpacas do not like to be touched, or pet. Instead her herd of 13 alpacas turn to her, and raise their ears.

“They are pretty animals – but they are not cuddly like a dog,” Durst said. “That’s how they were kept alive all these years, because they are very suspicious animals.”

Durst said she and her husband, Scott, purchased their White Barn Meadows home in 2002, and he was deployed to Iraq for what ended up being two years. Upon his return home, Durst said the pair set out fencing their property to safeguard the newest additions to their family. Soon after, Durst said she brought four alpacas home to live.

“After such stressful years with Scott in Iraq, I just needed to laugh,” she said. “And these guys just make me laugh.”

Since that time, Durst has been busy.

“This is my new passion, it’s added so much joy in my life – it’s just added so much,” she said.

Durst said a typical day has her up at 5 a.m. to feed the alpacas, and provide them with water, and mucks the stall, which takes about 20 minutes.

“Muck, water, feed – muck, water, feed,” she said. “They are very docile, and easy to take care of. They really don’t take a whole lot. Once a month, I have to give them a shot for meningeal worm, and I clip their toenails. It’s all very easy.”

She then heads out to her full-time job as an art teacher at Falmouth High School. When she returns home, it’s back out to the barn to care for the animals once more. She also works to promote the farm, which she is the only farm within Maine – and possibly in the U.S. – that specializes in just selling geldings. Other area farms specialize in breeding the animals, but Durst said she knew almost immediately that she wanted to focus instead on the fiber quality animals.

“After I started going to shows, I realized that breeding is not for me,” she said. “Although I respect it, it’s not fitting with my lifestyle. But there was a need for breeders to have someone take care of the geldings. It just seemed to fit. Specializing in just selling the geldings works for me. It’s not a huge money maker, but I’m not doing it for the money.”

Durst believes “the more the better” and uses the philosophy in her business. She will not sell less than four animals to any buyer. Buyers also must prove they are going to be “good parents.” She interviews each potential owner and views outlines of their property, where the animals will be housed and what type of fencing system they have in place.

“You really get emotionally attached to them,” she said. “How can you not? So, for me, it’s really important that they go to a good home.” In the inner part of her barn, Durst points out various hues of yarn, noting which animal the fabric stems from. She said alpaca yarn is often compared to cashmere due to its texture and softness, she said. It’s also hypoallergenic, and many people who are allergic to wool may not have the same reaction to alpaca fiber.

Durst said the alpacas are sheared once a year in May. Although she said she is still learning about the process of working with the alpaca fiber, she said she thoroughly enjoys finding out what thicknesses of yarn work for various creations, such as hats, mittens and sweaters.

“For me, it’s all a learning process,” she said. “I’ve been learning about the whole process, as well as about the fiber and the blends.”

Durst’s passion also has crossed paths with her profession. She recently served as a presenter at a local alpaca conference, and hopes in the future to expand that and work on a national level.

“That’s my big plan is to have more education around the U.S. and how beneficial it is to buy geldings,” she said. “I believe in it and I just want to spread the word.”

Durst said she hopes people will turn out to the Open Farm Days as it is a great chance for Durst to do what she loves to do – talk about her extended family and

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educate the public about alpacas.

"It's great to see the kids faces when they feed them," she said. "It's just priceless."

The Maine Alpaca Association Open Farm Weekend will take place this Saturday, Oct. 28 and Sunday, Oct. 29, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

White Barn Meadows is located at 458 River Road in Buxton. For more information, call 727-5914.

Long Plains Alpacas, on 301 Long Plains Road, in Buxton, also will be celebrating the event. For more information, call 727-3148.

On the Web: www.mainealpaca farms.com