

Black Sheep Handspinners Guild Newsletter

May 2008

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The Black Sheep meet from 11am-3pm on the second Saturday of the month at the Varna Community Center Route 366 in Varna, New York. Exceptions are the months of December, July, and August when we meet in member's homes.

May 10 from 11 AM to 3 PM
Varna Community Center
Route 266 in Varna, New York

The Karen weavers will talk about their work from 1:30 to 2:30 A translator accompanies them.
Link on the Karen people and pictures of weaving

<http://www.stolaf.edu/people/leming/karenlinks.htm>

Who Won the Afghan??

Lisa who works at the Office of the Aging was so delighted and surprised that she won. When called she said that, "I am sitting under it right now. I admire all the work that went into it. Lovely in every way. I can't thank the guild enough". And other nice things.

Afghan finances:

Total:	\$1,068
Expense for fiber	- 196
Donation to FoodNet	- 500
Seed money for next afghan	- 200
Money remaining	\$ 172

We continue to try to think of some way to spend this money in a way that will benefit the most guild members. Latest suggestions: Knit to Fit workshop

from Nancy Shroyer or a road trip to SOAR for the vending.

Marianne Pelletier is willing to take a survey of needs and wishes for teaching among guild members and organize the data. The information would be useful in to arranging the type of guild meeting that was held in February that everyone reported was a resounding success or workshops for Roc Day.

Pictures from Maryland Sheep and Wool Festival



Spinning Chair



We parked at the top of the hill, again



Bunnies



Music

From Vernice Church who has been our champion at the New York State Fair

You are a spinner. You have yarn that you have spun. You have something you have made with that yarn. Therefore you are ready to enter the New York State Fair. Here is what you must do:

Go online to the New York State Fair website to download the Fair Art & Home Center booklet so that you will have all of the rules and instructions to follow. This booklet is no longer published in a paper version.

On the home page for the Fair click the “Competitions” tab. You will see a section called “Download Premium Books and Entry forms”. Scroll down to Art & Home Center. You will need three documents:

General Exhibitor Information, Arts & Crafts Rules & Classes, and Arts & Crafts Entry Form

It is important to follow the instructions exactly as they are written or your items will be disqualified. And following the instructions is not hard, just not very creative!

Unless the book changes (it is not yet available as I write this) you will be entering Section M Handspun Yarn. There are eight classes to enter in this section. Your \$6 entry fee allows you to enter 5 things, but only one per class. I always try to enter 5—I want my moneys worth!

The first three classes are for skeins of yarn. They each require a written plan for usage. If you don't yet have a plan, make one up. They will not come to check after you get your winning yarn back! The key here is that the usage be appropriate for the yarn.

Class 1, proficiency of spin requires one 2-ply skein of about 2 ounces. Classes 2 & 3 require 2 skeins. Tie your skeins in at least two places with short pieces of that yarn, not string. Each item must also have an entry tag attached with either string or yarn. (This information is included in the section of the book headed “Procedures For Entering Arts And Crafts Competition” which also outlines everything you need to know about identifying your items and getting them to the Fair.)

Classes 4 and 5 are great classes to enter because the competition is much less. Sometimes they haven't even had enough entries to have the class.

Class 6, Adult sweater is the most competitive class, but don't let that stop you. I was winning in this class even back when they didn't give my skeins any ribbons. Class 7 is another highly competitive class because anything for an adult that isn't a hat, scarf, or sweater goes in it. Class 8 should be good to enter if you have a lovely afghan, pillow, etc.

We need to see every class of this competition entered by several representatives of the Blacksheep Handspinners. I remember when the winners from each guild would be counted up in the Wool Center. Blacksheep often had the highest number of ribbons. I can't hold up our reputation all by myself any longer! Get moving.

My records show that my first State Fair prize was a 3rd place in 1984. I don't have anything which shows if I had entered previously without any ribbons.

It is important to remember that the due date for the entry form is July 14th. Your items do not go to the Fair until the second week in August but they don't go at all if you haven't sent in the entry form and fee. Send in the form with 5 entries listed—you will still have a month to complete the entries. If you don't have all 5 things ready, it will not matter. I have been known to stay up all night to get an entry ready and then take off from work to get it to the Fair on time!

And don't forget the prize money ranges from \$2 to \$20. It takes a while saving up prize money to get a new wheel but the glory is priceless!

The Chenango Region Handspinners
Fifth Annual
Spin In & Fiber Festival

At The Black Bear Winery
In Greene, New York

Saturday, June 14, 2008 from noon to 6 pm



Join area Spinners, Knitters, and Fiber Artists as they relax and enjoy their craft on the rolling lawn of the Black Bear Farm Winery. There will be fiber-producing animals to see-alpacas from Nyala Farm Alpacas, angora rabbits, and a few young lambs. Vendors selling fibers, yarns, and supplies will be on-site.

To celebrate the 5th Spin-In, there will be two contests to enter: Handspun Yarn Competition and Handmade Garments. Fiber prizes will be awarded to the winners in each contest. For entry forms, contact Nancy Morey by e-mail at shadeyside@citlink.net.

Samples of many fibers will be available to try out while at the Spin-In - expand your fiber horizons!



And be sure to enjoy the latest wine releases from the Black Bear Farm Winery! For further information, contact the Winery at (607) 656-9863. For Vendor space, contact Nancy Morey at (607) 843-8243.

Looking for an easy beginning to spinning and skein contests??? Here it is!!!

**2008 Spin-In Skein & Garment Competition
Spin In and Fiber Festival
Chenango Region Handspinners**

All entries must be in place for judging by 12:30 pm on Saturday, June 14.
Winners will be announced at 3 pm.

Category A - Handspun Yarn

All yarns must be in 1-1/2 to 2 yard skeins, and weigh at least 2 ounces. Each skein must have a card attached to it with fiber content and method of preparation on one side, and the spinner's name on the other side.

Class 1 - Singles, any weight

Class 2 - 2 ply, fingering to sport weight

Class 3 - 2 ply, DK to worsted weight

Class 4 - 2 ply, bulky weight

Category B - Garments

Each garment must have a card attached to it describing the yarn and fiber content, construction method (knitted, crocheted, woven, felted, etc), and any finishing techniques on one side, and the name of the fiber artist on the other side.

Class 1 - Socks

Class 2 - Mittens, Hats, and Scarves

Class 3 - Baby and Children's items

Class 4 - Vests

Class 5 - Sweaters

Winner(s) in each class will be awarded prizes of fiber &/or yarn.

Work Every Bit as Wild as It Is Woolly

By Kirk Johnson
Published: April 5, 2008
The New York Times



Janie Osborne for The New York Times

NORRIS, Mont. — It sounds like something a Zen master might ask: How does the wool come off a sheep?

Montana State University's sheep-shearing school in Norris, Mont., helps to address a sudden shortage of talent resulting from global capitalism and a weakened American dollar.

O.K., these inhabitants of the Montana State University shearing school west of Bozeman may look as gentle as — well, as lambs. Just try working on one. But when you have a squirming 100-pound yearling between your knees, a roaring set of power shears in one hand, and a completely blank mind because everything your instructor just told you about which stroke comes next has faded into a white noise of panic and muscle fatigue, getting the wool off is not an academic question.

You stare down, bent over, and the universe contracts. It is only you, the sheep and the shears. Find the way, you think. Try to remember. Is the “long blow” next? Or up the brisket and under the neck? Or maybe the “top knot”?

To shear a sheep is to touch a fading chord of Western culture. In the 1990s alone, 40,000 sheep ranches blinked out of existence, a 38 percent decline. And the number of people who know how to shear is falling even faster. Which brings us to a sheep-shearing class here: 10 men and 5 women — a few entrepreneurs, some back-to-the-land idealists, a psychiatrist from Butte who has made a bet with his wife, three high school buddies, a home builder looking for an economic sideline in tough times and a reporter trying to get inside the story. And, of course, there are the sheep.

Sheep, you might think, should be among the mildest and easiest of animals to handle. In literature, they have been handy symbols since the days of Homer for innocence in the face of adversity, forever typecast as lost pals to Little Bo Peep or victims of the Big Bad Wolf. But in this three-day class, a harder truth emerges: Sheepish innocence and stoicism are only a front for the jagged reef on which beginners can founder. Sheep endure. It is the shearer who must adapt, adjust and pivot. “Learning to shear is a lesson in humility,” said one instructor, Jim Moore, a field agent at the Montana Sheep Institute, which focuses on all things woolly at Montana State University and runs training programs at the university's experimental ranch here about 30 miles west of its Bozeman campus.

This is a fortunate year to become an American shearer. In a strange local backwash of global capitalism and the weak United States dollar, the Australian and New Zealand shearing companies on which Western ranchers have come to depend are staying home this spring, unable to justify the exchange-rate loss. The short-term shortage of shearers, which the sheep institute tries to address, has meant all but guaranteed work for domestic talent, notwithstanding the long-term decline in American sheepranching, coincident with a growing foreign dominance. Still, there are motivations to learn shearing other than quick employment, or masochism.

Becky Weed, 48, runs about 150 sheep with her husband on a certified organic ranch and wool mill near Bozeman and was enrolled in the class. A geologist by training, Ms. Weed worked on hazardous waste cleanup projects for years and became obsessed with the idea of preserving a patch of earth by natural means. Learning to shear, she said, is part of that same impulse. “I see the interest in learning these old skills not as a backward-looking thing at all,” she said. “Old-timers have a lot to teach us.” Jolitta Spang, another student, said she wanted to bring sheep ranching back to the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, about 300 miles east of here, where she is a leader of a 4-H club. “Forty-one years old and I’m finally learning how to shear a sheep,” Ms. Spang said. “Not sure how much sense that makes, but how often do you get to do something like this. Cody Newland, 23, who completed four years in the Marines in December, including a tour in Iraq, drove 14 hours from his home in Oregon to be here. Soft-spoken but determined, he said he planned to buy his first flock of 150 sheep this spring. “I’ll be a sheep farmer the rest of my life, hopefully,” he said.

An unheated Montana shearing shed in March is a cold and cacophonous place. A grinding wheel for sharpening blades periodically screams from one corner. The thumping of sheep on the plywood floor is punctuated by the occasional curses of the students when a sheep gets loose and sets off a mad scramble of recapture. The thick, waxy feel of lanolin, the natural oil in sheep’s wool, hangs over everything, coating jeans and skin. Lanolin gives wool its waterproof property but is also completely enmeshed in the shearing process. It lubricates the cutting blades as the shearing comb slides across the sheep’s skin.

A good shearer can finish a sheep in two or three minutes and earn upward of \$70 to \$80 an hour, minus expenses. Mike Schuldt, one of the instructors, did one in 52 seconds in competition last year. This reporter, just a beginner, managed seven in a day and a half. There is poetry in watching any physical task done well. But shearing is more like ballet. The sheep and the shearer must move as one. Each shift of the shearer’s feet into a new position for the next set of strokes also shifts the sheep’s posture and weight, presenting a new flank or angle for the blade’s pass.

Shearing has its own language, too. The thick tuft on the sheep’s head is the “top knot.” A pass of the blade is a “blow.” The “long blow,” a big sweep of the shears on the animal’s side from rump to neck, comes near the end when in a sense the shearer connect the dots of the previous strokes. For some students, empathy was an issue, if mostly unspoken. Are the sheep stressed? Put in the right positions, though, some sheep went almost limp and closed their eyes. And when the work was done, they mostly scampered out the open end of the shed seeming no worse for wear. Meagan Rathjen, 22, a ranch hand at a sheep spread near Missoula — she came west from small-town Iowa, interested in helping support sustainable agriculture — nicked her first sheep. It was nothing too serious, but enough to draw a small trickle of blood, which looked stark and red against the yearling’s white skin. So quietly that almost no one else could hear, Ms. Rathjen bent down over the half-shorn animal, and apologized.

Cleaning fabrics with light using nanotechnology

Silk and wool are textile materials that are valued for their strength, warmth, water resistance, and texture. But these natural fibers of the protein keratin lack the stain resistance of synthetic fabrics, and are also generally susceptible to harsh processing conditions.

Now researchers from Monash University and Hong Kong Polytechnic University have developed self-cleaning keratin fibers by modifying them with TiO₂ nanoparticles under benign conditions. The researchers functionalized wool with an abundance of carboxylic groups using succinic anhydride, a mild acylating agent, to improve the affinity of the fibers to anatase TiO₂ nanocrystals. TiO₂ is an efficient photocatalyst and, when the fibers were stained with red wine then exposed to a solar light simulator, the stain degraded almost completely.

“Among the different crystalline forms of TiO₂, the anatase form shows the highest photocatalytic ability,” explains Walid A. Daoud of Monash University. “Biomaterials such as keratins are subject to photodegradation in presence of sunlight. They also have poor resistance to heat and strong chemicals and solvents. The nanocrystals reduce their photodegradation by absorbing the light and converting it into self-cleaning power to decompose contamination.” The nanocrystalline structure was chosen because of the fact that the smaller the particle, the higher surface area, and thus a higher efficiency of photocatalysis. TiO₂ at the nanoscale is so small that it is invisible and does not alter the texture, color, or feel of the fibers, adds Daoud.

Upcoming - May 2008

Guild meeting

May 9, 2008
The Karen weavers

Massachusetts Sheep and Woolcraft Fair

Cummington Fairgrounds, MA
May 24 and 25, 2008
<http://www.masheepwool.org>

Spin In and Fiber Festival

Chenango Region Handspinners
June 14 from noon to 6 PM
Black Bear Winery, Greene, NY

Ontario Handspinning Seminar

Beyond Wool.....there are other fibers
June 6-8, 2008
Georgian College, Barrie, Ontario
<http://www.ontariohandspinningseminar.ca/>

Cayuga County Fair

July 6, 2008
Weedsport, NY

Troy Fair

July 21-26
Troy, PA
<http://www.troyfair.com>

New York State Fair

August 21 to September 1, 2008
Syracuse, NY
<http://www.nysfair.org/fair>

Vermont Sheep and Wool Festival

September 6 & 7, 2008
Champlain Valley Expo, Essex Jct., VT
<http://www.vermontsheep.org/festival.html>

Finger Lakes Fiber Arts Festival

September 20 & 21
Hemlock Fairgrounds, Hemlock, NY
<http://www.gvhg.org/fest.html>

Fiber Fallout

Johsonburg, NJ
September 26th to 28th, 2008
<http://www.northcountryspinners.org/retreat.html>

Thanks to Vernice Church for the article on entering contests, Jean Warholic for the article on sheep shearing, Marie Bryham for the article on nanotechnology, and Audrey Lowes for pictures from Maryland. If you have something for the newsletter please send it to Anne Furman at ahf@dsl-zoom.net.



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www.spinningbunny.com

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To place an ad

A check for \$5.00 made to BSHG for an ad to run three times (a year is \$15) should be sent to the current treasurer, Eleanor May, 1360 Slaterville Road, Ithaca, NY. 14850. Send the ad to the newsletter editor, Anne Furman at jbfglass@lightlink.com. If you have a question for her or others, you can email us through the link at the top of the newsletter.



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Finger Lakes Fibers Yarn Store

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