

Getting Your Name Out There

When Doug and I first started Forest Glen Alpacas we were faced with the same question many farms face, how do we get people to come to our farm? As with most farms getting started our budget was very small and we had very limited knowledge of where to get the answers. So the advice of those who sold us our first animals became very important. After all what worked for them should work for us right? What worked for us was a combination of their advice and our own intuition as you will see.

We took delivery of our alpacas 6 months after we bought them having to set up fencing... We were advised to advertise in the Farm and Ranch Guide via AOBA. We became members of AOBA, ARI, and our state affiliate at the time Empire. We set up our website as recommended. Then we were faced with moving. Within 4 months of taking delivery we moved to a farm in PA 400miles away. You can imagine the whirl wind the next few months were, but in July of 2004 we finally moved 16 alpacas, 4 horses, 4 dogs, 1 cat, and a 180 gallon fish tank to PA!! We were not there 24 hours and I got a call from my aunt who was on the local chamber of commerce volunteer committee. She said she bought me a space at the local Oil Heritage Craft Show and entered the kids in the parade. I asked her when it was and she said July 22, it was July 20th now!! I could not believe it. I told her that there was no way I could get there and I was prepared with a whole list of reasons, as my husband was still in New York, I did not have a craft tent, I did not have enough inventory that is if I could find the box it was in.... But with some intense convincing not only from her, but the kids wanted to be in the parade, I reluctantly agreed. We used the costume that Heather and her alpaca, Barrington wore at MAPACA the previous year and I located our inventory. My parents brought tables... to the craft fair. I thought that I was all set until that morning of July 22nd. We awoke to, as anyone living in NW PA in 2004 can attest to RAIN!!! Not just a few sprinkles but we were considering building the ARK, it was pouring. Not wanting to disappoint my aunt and all those who were helping us, we went to the craft fair and believe it or not people were still setting up!! I unloaded our stuff on the curb and my parents and kids watched it while I ran to Kmart to get a tent. We set up and low and behold within a couple of hours the sun was coming out. By lunch time it was 80 degrees and very humid. I thought to myself, I'm never going to sell alpaca scarves, hats, gloves... in this weather. But you know what? Not only did I sell some things I gave out 250 business cards. I talked until my voice was horse, answering questions about alpacas, where we were, would we be open for Christmas.... Tip 1: I planted the seed for Christmas sales!! And I did it with very little cost to my budget.

The next day was the parade for the kids. Thanks goodness the rain looked like it would hold off at least until after the 11:00 am parade. We got Barrington in the van and got his costume and my daughters on and we arrived in time for the parade. She was in the "kids and their pets section". We ended up at the park at the end of the parade surrounded by people asking question and wanting to know where we were and if they could visit. A reporter wanted pictures for the local paper and wanted to come out to the farm and do a story on us. I was overwhelmed. The picture of Heather and Barrington was on the front page of the paper the next day and by the end of the week that reporter came out and did a whole story on us. We were featured in the following weekend paper

as well. Tip 2: We received FREE advertising just by participating in a local event. From that article we met our first alpaca clients and sold our first alpaca.

I still was not convinced that the craft fairs were the way to go but as fall was approaching people kept calling about buying Christmas gifts, saying they saw us at the Oil Heritage Craft fair in July, I began to rethink my conclusions. In October one of my aunt's friends called and wanted to know if I wanted her daughter's two tables at the Santa's Workshop. She assured me it would be worth my while as it was a well established craft fair. Having been around for 20 years it was well known and well attended. The cost of the table was more than I had ever paid before but I said yes. It was definitely well worth it. The sales were tremendous and I made some contacts with schools and other groups that were looking for fun, educational field trips for their members. It launched the next phase of getting our name out there. Tip 3: We have had many groups come and visit the farm and shop at the gift shop. Some of the groups that have come are grade schools, high schools, knitters guilds, Christian women's groups, 4 H groups, boy scouts and girl scouts, the red hat club, and adult day care centers to name a few. I do about 8 craft fairs a year now. It is a good source of income.

Tip 4: I've been asked to speak to local groups. Basically just talking about what an alpaca is and what they are used for... I've spoken for Christian women's groups, schools, men's groups, Rotary clubs, Adult day cares, nursing homes, churches, and many others. It is great exposure and I'm always handing out business cards. Many have come to shop here at the farm due to having my card. I've never charged a fee but I consider it time well spent.

Tip 5: I've been asked to bring our alpacas to church picnics, nursing homes, vacation bible schools, schools and parades. Again, people are always asking questions and taking our business cards.

Tip: 6 Join your local Chamber of Commerce, we have the Oil Region Alliance also, and of course your state alpaca affiliate!!

Tip:7 Advertise locally. I've advertised in the Oil Region Alliance Visitor's Guide the past 3 years and that has been the single most beneficial advertising I've done. It is a guide that goes to all the campgrounds, hotels, and visitor centers in our area. I've had visitors from all over the country come as they are vacationing in the area and looking for local attractions. They buy alpaca products!! I've advertised on placemats at restaurants and local county maps and sponsored a craft class at the county fair.

As you can see, I've found inexpensive ways to get our farm name out there. Anyone, who has been to our farm, knows that we are definitely off the beaten path. No one just drives by and sees our animals from the road. Their destination has to be Forest Glen Alpacas to come our way. My budget, especially that first 2 years was very small but we were able to get it done. Be creative and open to new ideas. You never know what doors they will open up.