

Competition herds crowd for Sheep and Fiber Festival

13th annual event planned for May 21-22 at Greene County Fairgrounds



By Katie Anderson May 11, 2016



Linda Winegar, owner of Artbeat in Waynesburg, paints a wooden sheep with a Vincent van Gogh theme. Area businesses decorated the signs to raise money and advertise for the Sheep and Fiber Festival on May 21 and 22 at the Greene County Fairgrounds. - Katie Anderson / Observer-Reporter [Order a Print](#)

WAYNESBURG – Diane Rabinowitz has been weaving on and off since 1979, but later this month the Pittsburgh woman will participate in her first weaving competition.

“I have never done this before, and I’m learning from scratch,” she said.

The fleece to shawl competition has lured crowds for years, said organizer Lynda West of Washington County. The competition is one of many attractions during the during the 13th annual Sheep and Fiber Festival on May 21 and 22 at Greene County Fairgrounds.

West said this year three teams of five will use sheep, alpaca or other types of animal fibers to make a shawl in three hours. The team will card, or separate, the fleece, and spin and weave it into a shawl of a certain width and length.

"The judging is based on the teamwork and how attractive the finished shawls are," West said.

She said the teams will come with a loom already prepared with dyed fiber and a sample shawl.

Rabinowitz's team met Wednesday to work on its sample shawl as practice for the competition in two weeks. Her team, from the Washington Spinners and Weavers Guild, consists of one carder, three spinners and one weaver.

Last year, the team from the guild won second place.

"I watched the competition in Waynesburg years ago," she said.

"It's really exciting, and we've been preparing as a team for this."

Julianna Heiby, of Peters Township, one of the spinners for the team, has been spinning and weaving for more than two years.

"When we get together for our practice, we'll have the wheels and loom set up and the fleece picked out," she said.

"We'll sit together and be able to do a trial run."

The team will use Alpaca fleece this year and Rabinowitz's 26-inch folding floor loom, which she said takes a full day to set up.

"I'm a little nervous, but mostly excited," Rabinowitz said. "The speed part is an interesting aspect to it because getting distracted can complicate things as people walk by and ask questions."

West said there will be several other competitions at the festival, which she called “two days of fun and frivolity.”

She said there will be hand-spun yarn competitions along with fleece, crocheting and rug weaving. There will also be demonstrations for dog herding and sheep shearing, live animals and music. Local chefs will prepare lamb dishes to sample, she said.

The festival also includes children’s activities and 4-H programs and between 40 and 50 vendors, most of which will be selling products related to animal fibers.

West said the festival used to be held on High Street in Waynesburg, but as it grew, they moved it to the fairgrounds after its third year.

“Washington and Greene counties have a long history of agricultural excellence,” West said. “The purpose of this festival is to capitalize on that heritage and share it with other people.”

At one time, there was more sheep and wool produced in Greene County than in any county in the state, according to Carol Adamson, one of the founding members of the festival who now serves as chairperson.

“It has fallen to third behind Lancaster and Washington because there are fewer producers in the county and because we began to have a real problem with coyotes in 1998,” Adamson said. “A lot of people don’t want to fight that kind of battle.”

She said this area is “very conducive” for raising sheep.

“It’s rolling hills and it’s green, and sheep like that,” she said.

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