

# The Whidbey Examiner

News from the Heart of Whidbey Island

Thursday, November 03, 2011

## Farms to show fiber art, critters this weekend

**By Betty Freeman**  
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On a rainy fall day in Clinton, Mary Donaty of Paradise Found Fiber Farm trudges out to the barn to visit her herd of fiber animals – 25 aging llamas, 12 non-breeding Suri and Huacaya alpacas, and 23 Pygora goats.

“C’mere Nutmeg,” she calls, and soon a big brown llama sidles over for a pat and nuzzle.

Each of Donaty’s animals has a name and a history she can recite. Donaty says she is known locally as the “llama lady,” but describes herself as “a fiber artist who loves her animals.”

“Some of them were rescued from other farms,” she said. “They’ll all have a good home here and will retire with us.”

Paradise Found Fiber Farm is the third farm for Donaty and her husband Lou. They raised fiber animals in Carnation, Wash., and in California before finding their own version of paradise here on Whidbey Island 13 years ago.

Paradise Found Farm is a fiber farm, rather than a breeding farm. Donaty has been raising “lamas,” which is the family nickname for llama/alpaca/guanaco/vicuna, for more than 25 years.

Unlike sheep’s wool, the fiber of llamas, alpacas and Pygora goats is called “hair” when the animal is still wearing it.

Donaty shears her own goats, but brings in a professional shearer for the larger llamas and alpacas. The raw fiber must be cleaned with a process known as “skirting and blowing” before it goes to a mill to be made into rovings and batts.

When it comes back, Donaty hand dyes and spins the fiber into skeins.

Donaty estimates she spends four hours every day on farm chores, and four hours a day doing fiber work, whether it’s cleaning, dyeing, spinning or creating knitted or felted items for sale in her farm shop, the Fiber Shack.



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Mary Donaty has been spinning for over 30 years. Here she uses her demonstration wheel in her Fiber Shack farm store at Paradise Found Fiber Farm in Clinton.

### Fiber Quest details

When: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.,  
Thursday through Sunday, Nov.  
3-6

Farms:

Paradise Found Fiber Farm,  
Clinton

Island Bliss Farm, Oak Harbor

Pronkin' Pastures, Greenbank

Olympic Mist Farm, Freeland

Fern Ridge Farm, Clinton

Yarn Shops: Knit & Sew, Oak

Harbor

Knitty Purls, Langley

Paradise Found Fiber Farm is one of five fiber farms with shops that will be open for the Whidbey Island Fiber Quest Tour, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday through Sunday, Nov. 3-6.

Other fiber farms on the tour include Island Bliss Farm in Oak Harbor, Pronkin' Pastures in Greenbank, Olympic Mist Farm in Freeland, and Fern Ridge Farm in Clinton.

Two yarn shops, Oak Harbor's Knit & Sew and Knitty Purls in Langley, also are on the tour.

The farm stores display items made from the fibers of the animals raised there. Some of the farms also belong to fiber co-ops and purchase finished goods made from alpaca fibers, and some display goods made by others.

Donaty makes all of her items by hand from fiber produced by her own animals.

"In most cases I can tell visitors which animal donated the fiber that was used to create a scarf or hat I've made," she said. "The support from the farm stores helps keep hay in the barn and our animals happy and healthy."

Whidbey's fiber farmers host three events each year – Fiber Quest in November and May, and the Whidbey Island Fabulous Fall Fiber Sale in September – all aimed at promoting their farms and the fiber arts available through the farm shops.

"We fiber farmers want to bring awareness that we are here, and hope visitors will support us and maybe buy a gift or skeins of yarn," Donaty said.

A visit to [WhidbeyFiberQuest.com](http://WhidbeyFiberQuest.com) will provide a map showing all seven locations on the tour. Obtain a Fiber Quest ticket at the first farm, have it initialed, pick up a business card, and turn the ticket and your business card collection in at the last farm or shop you visit. Completed tickets will be entered in a grand prize drawing on Nov. 11 for a gift basket of products from all participating farm stores.

The farm shops on the Fiber Quest tour are also open year 'round. Fiber artists and farmers participating in this weekend's Fiber Quest are happy to give you a tour of their farms, explain the history and the husbandry of the animals they care for, and show you their artistry in the handmade goods they sell.

"Making fiber art and caring for the animals is part of who I am," Donaty said. "I do it all for the love of the animals and the art, and the hope for enough sales to keep doing it for a long time."