

Triple Diamonds Alpaca Ranch plans a big Expo September 13

Triple Diamonds Alpaca Ranch is hosting their annual Alpaca Day Expo on Saturday, September 13 between 12 and 6 pm. If you've never been kissed by an alpaca, this is your chance. Bring the kids. This will be fun for the entire family. Recently I visited the ranch and learned a lot about these amazing, soft, furry animals.



Kathy Aksten and Danny Meier, owners of Triple Diamonds Alpaca Ranch and Boutique

"We'll have a 120 ft. tent. And then we have 40 to 50 vendors there and then we have a food tent, we have Grant from Burroughs who sings and plays the guitar. We have Brighton Ford out here with vehicles. We have alpacas out in pens so the kids can walk them." said Danny Meier, who owns the ranch with his wife, Kathy Aksten.

Between 1500 to 3000 people are expected to visit. There will be a photographer to get a picture of you getting an alpaca kiss, T-Bonez will be set up with lots of food and there will be live music. There will be lots of product variety, from local merchants and crafterst. There will be lots for kids to do. There's face painting and bounce houses. There will be various animals for kids to see, possibly some camels, llamas, goats and horses. C&C Sports will be on hand to exhibit some big toys for the guys. Also, the rock climbing wall that was in downtown Brighton during the Art Festival will be coming out. There will also be raffles for gifts. The proceeds will go toward Livingston County Animal Control who will be at the Expo with all their dogs and cats for adoptions.

And all this is to raise the public awareness of these beautiful, soft, furry creatures. Alpacas are very happy animals! But they have to be part of a herd. They don't do well alone, but if you have two or three, or more in a herd, they are at their best. "You know, we do a lot of ranch visits," Meier said. "And we do have people come up to us and say 'God, your animals are so friendly. And it's just amazing how they all just come running up to us. But we're all hands on and all of them probably get a big hug and a kiss at least once, twice or three times a week.'"

Alpacas are naturally clean and housebroken, like cats. And the Triple Diamonds herd loves being around humans. They often bring them into the boutique in downtown Brighton. During my visit, the entire herd would follow us wherever we went. On September 13, during the Expo. 5 are expected to be born around that time.

"So hopefully," Aksten said, "we'll have a baby born on that day. Two years ago we had about 900 people watching a birth and then stayed for hours watching the baby get up and nurse and get running around."

At first they purchased 3 alpacas, which they called the Triple Diamonds Alpacas. The ranch is called the Triple Diamonds Alpaca Ranch. The triple diamonds mean past, present and future.

"So, we got into the alpacas, showed them, then we took classes on how to shear them," Aksten said. "We used to have shearers come in, but we learned how to shear them ourselves. So we shear our alpacas and then we have our crop, our annual fleece. Some of it goes off to some of the smaller mills in the United States and gets processed into yarns, rovings, which spinners use to make yarns, battings for quilters and some socks and rugs and things like that. In the United States, alpacas were imported from South America, Bolivia and Chile. Some of your darker animals come from that area."

CREATING A NEW U.S. ALPACA HERD

The Peruvian government wasn't allowing export of these animals into the United States. In 1984 there was a deal made, and they allowed for about 25 groupings of animals to be imported. And they brought in the animals. The alpaca registry is very controlled. Every animal that's in the registry is DNA tested to prove who the sire and the dam are. Every animal is registered. They all have microchips in them. Two major co-ops in the country collect every year's crop of fleece. They sort it by different criteria, mostly for fineness. Then they create these beautiful sweaters that you see in the boutique.

"That's how we got into the product and we started selling it at the Meier greenhouse at the flower shop. And then last November we decided to open the store in Downtown Brighton," said

Aksten. "What we've tried to do in our community is create awareness of what an alpaca is and what we do with them. So that's why we have the big event every year. More and more people are becoming familiar with the luxurious, natural alpaca fibre."

Alpaca fibre is 7 to 10 times warmer than wool, soft like cashmere, lightweight. It naturally wicks away moisture and comes in 22 different natural colors. The white fibre is the finest of all the fibres. The blacks are the coarsest. "In our breeding programs, we're very much aware of that," said Aksten. "So we try to take some of the lighter colors and push them into the genetic lines of the darker so we can get a finer black fibre, which is what we've done. We've got some grand champion blacks here that have a very fine fibre for what they are."

As I looked around the ranch I commented on the idyllic beauty of their acreage. It struck me as the perfect refuge from the busy, bustling life back in town.

"When I come back in my second life I want to be an alpaca, and I definitely want to live on a ranch like the Triple Diamonds because these things are spoiled. They don't have to do much. And whatever they want, they get." - Danny Meier

"Kathy and I just said the other day, my Mom called and said 'When are you gonna come up to the cottage?' We wake up in the morning and we feel we're on vacation," Meier commented.

"Yes. We've created a wonderful lifestyle, that's for sure," Aksten agree. "This is our lifestyle. We love it. We love what we do."

"And in the morning we have our coffee," said Meier. "Six o'clock we get up. And we sit on the front porch, watch the alpacas and we go out there and look at them. And then we go to work and we come back and here we are again."

"We've been doing this for 8 years now," said Meier. "And, at night these little ones, just before sunset, they would prunk through the pastures. And you stop to watch them. It's just unbelievable. It's more so in September & October when it gets a little chilly. All the mothers are just grazing and all the little ones are dodging in between. They run like deer."

"They're very attentive when you're alone with them," added Meier. "If you sat right here and we were to leave, they'd be all around you. They'd be coming up to you. They'd be pulling on the back of your hair. They'd be putting their face in front of yours, sniffing you. And then when you get 'em, they



Kathy and Danny inspect a newborn alpaca

two or three or more. By themselves they don't do as well.

THE ALPACA BOUTIQUE

Danny and Kathy opened their store in Downtown Brighton 4 weeks before Christmas and it was a smashing hit. They have a lot of different variations of socks, sweaters and golf vests, raw alpaca fleece and yarns for sale. "We have lots of alpaca teddy bears and bunnies and all these wonderful gift ideas. We have Alpaca Silver, which is a Peruvian jewelry line. Alpaca Silver is a blend of different metals. The jewelry is a big hit," said Aksten.

"In the wintertime we sell a bunch of coats, which are phenomenal. Because they're 7 to 10 times warmer than wool and lightweight. You can have a sweater on that would be equivalent to a real thick wool sweater. The alpaca is non-allergenic. They don't produce lanolin in their fleece like sheep. There's no grease to get out. The actual scales on the outside of each fibre are a lot less than wool. That's why you can hold it up against your skin. It's very comfortable as well as insulating. Also, we're going to be carrying a home line of comforters and things that you can keep on all summer long because the comforters also keep heat away," said Aksten.

Alpaca products are warm in the winter, but what about for summer use? "We have golf sweaters and running socks because it wicks away moisture," explained Aksten. "It doesn't absorb like cotton. Our socks are phenomenal. The fibre has a great memory. Our biggest sellers are socks. I think everybody got alpaca socks in their Christmas stocking."

"Mountain climbers come in and stock up on socks, hats, gloves, because they can sleep in them," said Aksten

"And we're going to have long-johns. They're a little pricey, but that'll be the last pair you'll ever have to buy," Meier said.

Triple Diamond Boutique
is located at 434 W. Main St., Brighton
Phone 810-588-6384
www.triplediamondsalpaca.com
Ranch Address:
3275 E. Schafer, Howell