

Camelid Community: The Llama and Alpaca World's Only National Gathering

Camelid Community is the only national forum that offers the opportunity for dialog among representatives of national, regional and local camelid organizations as well as interested individuals and owners. Providing a unique forum in which to assess the "state of the union" of the llama and alpaca world, Camelid Community encourages open and candid discussion of industry issues and goals.

Celebrating Diversity, Sharing Goals

Bringing together concerned llama and alpaca organizations and individuals to discuss issues, suggest solutions and work toward common goals is critical to the existence of our community. Camelid Community offers people the chance to exchange ideas and identify opportunities to help one another and the camelid community at large. Recent gatherings have focused on how much the llama and alpaca industries have in common and how we and our animals benefit when we work together on the issues that affect us all. From government relations to research to camelid welfare concerns, llama and alpaca owners alike reap the benefits when both industries cooperate in developing solutions to common problems.

Background and History

In the 1990s the International Llama Association (now defunct) sponsored an annual Llama Assembly, the last of which was held in Colorado Springs in 1997. Representatives of a number of llama and alpaca organizations got together to host Llama & Alpaca Symposium in Kansas City in 1998, a highly successful and representative event. There was no similar gathering in 1999. Feeling the need for such a gathering on an annual basis, several members of the Llama Association of North America tried to get it going again by hosting Llama Community in 2000 in Kansas City. Though numbers were few at first, attendance grew as hosting and facilitating rotated among various groups and individuals so that no one group "owned" the event. At the 2004 gathering the group voted to change the name to Camelid Community to better reflect the background and interests of members.

Accomplishments

As a result of coming together at Camelid Community to work on issues affecting both llamas and alpacas, a number of important goals have been achieved, and others are in the works. The following highlights some of them:

*A series of easy to reproduce brochures was designed to reach new and prospective camelid owners, allowing organizations, individuals and businesses to add their own contact information before printing. They include: *The Basics of Alpaca & Llama Care*; *The Basics of Alpaca & Llama Fiber*; *Alpacas, Llamas & Youth*; *Alpacas & Llamas as Therapy Partners*; *Camelids Can Carry! Packing with Llamas & Alpacas*.

**Customize to Maximize*, a packet of ideas on how to create a successful camelid business, was created to encourage llama and alpaca owners to put together their own individual plans for making the most of their animals and their fiber.

*A press packet was developed that includes a llama and alpaca fact sheet, poster, sample press release and tips on how to use the various publicity pieces.

*Two standards of care documents were produced. *Minimum Standards of care for Llamas & Alpacas* is a short piece designed for use with animal control authorities. *Recommended Practices in Caring for Llamas & Alpacas* is a larger brochure designed for those interested in raising camelids.

*The National Lama Intervention & Rescue Coordination Council (IRC Council) was created to provide an efficient system of coordinating llama and alpaca rescue efforts nationwide, help promote camelid welfare through education, and open up larger dialog on camelid welfare within the llama and alpaca community.

*A Halter Donation Program was established to give members of the camelid community the opportunity to donate new and gently used halters for use in camelid welfare and re-homing situations. Stations are set up at llama and alpaca shows and events across the country.

*The llama and alpaca research conducted through the Morris Animal Foundation (MAF) has been promoted and publicized in order to generate additional support from the camelid community for these critical studies. More than 50 projects relating to llamas and alpacas have been funded through MAF since the first study in 1990.

*As a result of efforts by Camelid Community attendees, qualified representation on the Lama Medical Research Group (LMRG) has been increased and financial support provided for those representatives. LMRG members provide industry input by reviewing proposed camelid research projects for applicability and affordability.

Be Part of Camelid Community

Camelid Community tries to have representatives from all geographical regions, local and regional camelid groups, national camelid registries and show associations and, in addition, encourages interested individuals to participate in the annual gathering. Besides bringing a variety of issues, concerns and perspectives to Camelid Community, participants return to their respective groups with the results of these industry-wide discussions, as well as copies of reports submitted and presentations made.

Held the first weekend in August, Camelid Community meets in Kansas City, Missouri, which has easy airport access and fairly central proximity for people coming from all parts of the country. If you or your organization would like to be on the list to receive a registration packet for the next Camelid Community, contact Sheila Fugina (bsfugina@frontier.com, 715-246-5837) or Barb Baker (bebaker@earthlink.net, 740-397-1736). Publications produced by Camelid Community, as well as other information on the gathering, are available in the Camelid Community section at www.icinfo.org, the website for the International Camelid Institute (ICI).