

HISTORY OF THE SSLA

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE SSLA

By Liliane Grant

In the late 70's the first llamas made their appearance in the South. Until then, most llamas in the U.S. were found out west and in a few zoos in the East.

In 1986, Pam and Richard Freeman from Folsom, LA bought some llamas and hired Greta Carsten from Colorado to be their farm manager. Greta convinced Pam to start an association, and in the spring of 1987, they hosted a gathering of llama owners from the southern states. The Freemans donated seed money toward this organization which was called "The Sunshine States Llama Association". Greta Carsten became its first president.

Several years later, in 1991, the name was changed to "The Southern States Llama Association".

In 1988, before ALSA, SSLA held its first llama show at Wills Park in Alpharetta, GA. The show featured halter classes, obstacle classes, llama races and demonstrations on spinning and weaving. Over 500 people paid admission to see the llamas.

Many things were accomplished over those first few years. The SSLA Newsletter was started, yearly educational and fun conferences were held, a llama herd was established at Auburn University, ALSA llama shows were organized, and in 1990, the SSLA even hosted the International Llama Association Annual Conference in downtown Atlanta.

THE FOLLOWING YEARS

By Karen Oertley-Pihera

At a general membership meeting October 16, 1992, the membership approved incorporating the SSLA as a *Georgia corporation*. The agent for the corporation has to be a *Georgia resident*.

The Llama Journal: In the beginning, the "Sunshine States Llama Newsletter" was edited by Myra Freeman. Liliane Grant took over editorship in 1991. It was published quarterly and became "The Llama Journal". Various wonderful volunteer editors have produced this magazine through the years since.

The GNF: In 1991 Jack and Tracy Pearson, with the help of a lawyer, worked very hard to finally convince the Georgia National Fair in Perry, Georgia, to allow llamas to compete in the livestock shows. The Fair insisted that in exchange for allowing llamas to be shown, llamas had to be exhibited the entire 10 days of the Fair. The first year, llamas were housed in the cattle barn. Tracy Pearson remembers one of the exhibitors slipping and falling in a cow patty. The cattle people pressured fair officials to house the llamas elsewhere. The second year, the llama show had to supply its own tents for stalls and an arena. It rained so hard the tents flooded. Seeing all those fan extension cords underwater was unnerving. The halter classes were moved to the aisles of a horse barn. A fair official locked the horse stalls so llama owners could not use them (and later, traveled to the Pearson ranch to apologize for this action). Over the next decade or so, that 10 day llama exhibit exposed millions of fair goers to the llama world. The Pearsons ran the exhibit the first year, and the Grants and the Bells (with help and animals from the Hollistons, Coussens, Chestnuts and Schumans) for the next 13+ years, most of that time under the auspices of the Georgia Llama and Alpaca Social Organization (GLASO). The Piheras were show superintendents for about 8 of those years. In 2006, Liliane Grant and Diane Bell retired from chairing the llama exhibit at the National Fair, and the SSLA took it on as an SSLA show without the ten days of llama exhibition.

Discover Llamas:

With the first Llama Exhibit at the Georgia State Fair in 1991, the predecessor of "Discover Llamas" was first produced for distribution to the public. The first issue was named after the llama exhibit itself - "The Dixie Llama Jamboree" - and contained ads and articles about llama uses, care and husbandry. The following two years the Pearsons edited "Why Llamas" to be

distributed in Perry, and mailed to various llama ranches across the country. From 1994 on, various volunteer editors from the SSLA membership have edited the publication, re-naming it "Enrich Your Life- Discover Llamas", and ultimately just "Discover Llamas". The publication is made available to SSLA members to give to potential new owners, and to southeastern show superintendents to hand out at shows. It has also been distributed annually at the National FFA conference in the Midwest.

Shows:

The SSLA supports many llama and alpaca shows throughout the southeast with "Best of Show" and "Performance Champion" trophies, and Youth High Point Awards for youth who excel in performance and showmanship.

In 2001, the SSLA held its own first show- the SSLA Spring Show which was later merged with the Hillbilly Show.

Also in 2001, Susan and Don Wheeler convinced the ALSA board to add another region to their regional championship shows, and superintended the first Southeast Regional ALSA Championship Show, held at Chicopee Ag Center in Gainesville, GA. SSLA co-sponsored the ALSA Regional show for 11 years. In 2012 the show became a non-ALSA Regional Championship Show.

As mentioned above, the SSLA took over the Llama and Alpaca Show at the Georgia National Fair in Perry in 2006.

The SSLA Sweepstakes Awards were the brainchild of Helen Farley.

Sweepstakes trophies are awarded to top show performers from the past year at the SSLA annual meetings.

Scholarships:

The Auburn University Scholarship: SSLA member Judy Fee pioneered commercial llama trekking in the East, leading happy campers and hikers on trails in North Carolina and Virginia. When Judy died in 2000, a scholarship for veterinary students was set up at Auburn University in Alabama. The SSLA succeeded in raising enough money over the years for this scholarship to be self-endowed (self-supporting).

The SSLA College Youth Scholarship: In 2002, this fund was begun to help deserving SSLA college students with their education costs. This scholarship was the brainchild of the youth committee and developed into a \$500 a year, four year scholarship. Jessica Rothering was the first recipient in 2003. At the annual meeting that year, Tom Rothering and Del Clark presented the SSLA with \$7000 from the Florida Llama Association to be used for this scholarship. This money had been raised over the years at auctions and raffles at the Florida State Fair.

Other SSLA events and projects:

The SSLA has hosted numerous *Veterinary Clinics* for owners and veterinarians over the years. Emergency parasite seminars were held in Ringold and at RedTop Mountain in Georgia when many SSLA farms began experiencing sudden deaths from parasites. SSLA has also co-hosted several camelid seminars covering many medical topics at the University of Georgia.

Farm Days- educational and social gatherings- have been held through the years at SSLA member farms. One of the first was in September of 1990 at the Fish Hatchery in Cohutta, GA, hosted by the Shinnicks. This was a weekend of llama camping, fishing, eating and llama obstacle course activities.

Fiber Clinics at member farms have also been a big hit through the years with SSLA members.

The SSLA sponsors spring and fall *Llama Rendezvous and Pack Trials* every year in the southeast. In fact, the national Pack Llama Trial Association (PLTA) recently announced that the SSLA sponsored more pack trials in the last seven years than any other organization in the country. The Rendezvous are fun weekend events and a great opportunity to get out on the trails with llamas and llama friends.

The SSLA Llama Trekking Awards were instituted in 2009. Patches are awarded annually for miles trekked with llamas on public land trails.

The SSLA Llama Ambassador Awards were begun the same year, with medals awarded for the greatest number of public appearances with llamas during the previous year. (See guidelines for these various award programs later in this notebook.)