

# Ag Salute

## Couple finds life's meaning in the mountains

### Paca Peace ranch shares way of life with students

By Jan Murawski Evans,  
Contributor



Photo by Jan Murawski Evans

**Bob and Sue Hill lead their alpacas in the Western Days Parade in Westcliffe.**

**WESTCLIFFE, Colo.** — The fifth graders wait patiently, leaning against the barn wall. Six alpaca geldings study the kids and cautiously make their way toward the barn. The animals seem to be sensing the energy of the students, sizing them up, deciding which one would make a good friend. Eventually each of the alpacas chooses a student who they will bond with one weekend a month over the course of the next six months.

For 38 years, Bob Hill of rural Westcliffe had managed other people's farms and animals in northern Illinois before he retired in 1999. Sitting by the fire with his wife, Sue, he imagined what retirement in Colorado would

be like, and he thought he'd like to have some animals of his own. Sue agreed, though she didn't want animals that people eat. So Bob started the research and discovered alpacas, animals native to the high mountains of South America that are raised for their soft, strong fiber.

Sue was retiring from her 14 years as an elementary teacher and kindergarten through 12th grade counselor. The more they learned about alpacas the more it seemed only natural to share these quiet animals with local school children.

It took a year to get the non profit 501(3)(c) corporation finalized, but the Hills used the time to develop their curriculum and student selection process. They planned to use their Custer County property as their home and Paca Peace Ranch, a haven for kids and alpacas and the learning that caring for animals offers these pre-adolescent students.

In her years as a teacher and school counselor, Sue recog-

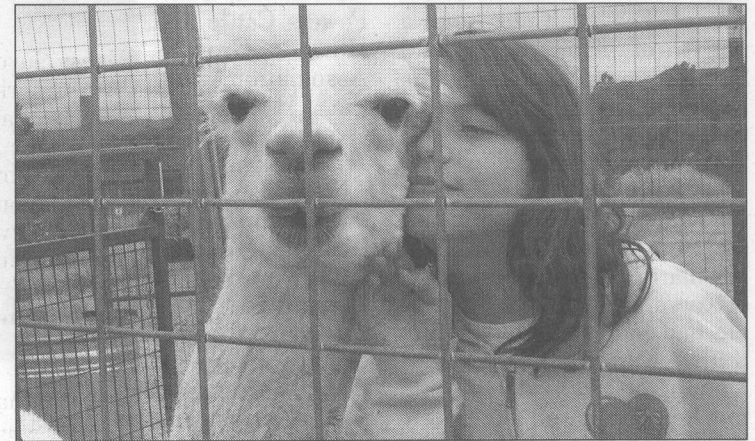


Photo by Jan Murawski Evans

**Bonding with alpacas requires a trusting relationship.**

nized the difficulties that many students encountered in fifth grade and the difference that intervention during this crucial stage could bring. As they developed the program, they included conflict resolution, so the kids could not only get along during the monthly weekend programs, but also learn the steps to making good decisions in all areas of their lives.

The Hills planned their new

home to include a handicapped accessible ground level dormitory to house the five girls one weekend a month and five boys on another weekend. The barn and alpaca pens can be seen from the second floor living room and kitchen where the students prepare and eat their meals. From their own food preparation to alpaca weight

See **Attendees Page 15** ▶

## Attendees gain confidence from program

From Page 6

management the students learn about healthy lifestyles for themselves and their charges.

The biggest benefit of participation in the Paca Peace Ranch program seems to be the increased confidence that the students exhibit with their peers and in their school work. Building relationships with these gentle animals requires calm, relaxed, positive attitudes and the kids who develop these attitudes during their time at Paca Peace Ranch carry these attitudes home and to school.

All the fourth grade students in the Wet Mountain Valley north to Cotopaxi visit the farm in April on field trips. The 2005 field trip theme was "Celebrating Differences" that showed the students how the alpaca geldings, were different in their reactions to various situations and offered the kids a chance to show which alpaca they were most like. Some alpacas are quick to check out any new people and their curiosity outweighs any fear of the new situation while other hang back, waiting to see if it's safe to come forward. The students who felt like they were more curious than fearful would stand near the photo of the alpaca that acted like they would.

This exercise gave the students an opportunity to express their differences within their groups and taught them that even alpacas are not all exactly the same when dealing with life situations.

The fourth grade field trips are the first step in the selection process for the next year's residential program. Ten youth, five girls and five boys, are chosen to participate based on their interest and recommendations from teachers. As the program enters its third year, more students have applied than the Hills have spaces available. This heightened interest is a tribute to the program and the Hills dedication to their young charges.

To accommodate youngsters who would benefit from more one on one contact with adults, Paca Peace Ranch has developed a day program for two boys and two girls. These students will learn about alpaca ranch management and experience many of the same activities that the residential stu-

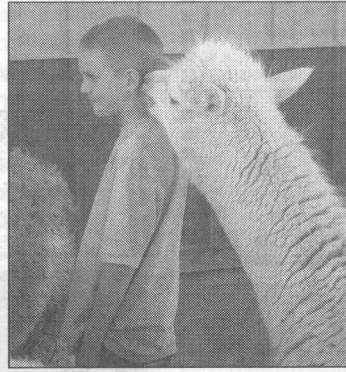


Photo provided

**This alpaca gives his friend a 'paca nose' to show his affection.**

dents do with the addition of the extra time with Bob or Sue Hill.

The students who have been chosen for the 2005-2006 programs will visit the ranch with their families on separate days for orientation. The parents learn about the curriculum

and expectations, tour the dorm and ranch facilities and familiarize themselves and their students with the Paca Peace Ranch programs.

Saturday, May 14 is graduation day for the 2004-2005 participants. The students will demonstrate what they have learned for their families and friends and accept their Paca Peace Ranch Manager Certificates.

From learning how to approach and build trust with alpacas to determining the choices they will make in their home and school lives, the Paca Peace graduates learn more than just about caring for animals. Setting goals and planning the steps to achieve those goals are an important life skill that the students encounter with alpacas and the other students.

Trust, making responsible choices, leadership, realizing and dealing with feelings, team building and healthy choices are themes that the Bob and Sue Hill demonstrate to their charges from August through March. The students learn as much about themselves as they do about alpacas and that knowledge will serve them throughout their lives.

*Paca Peace Ranch is located north of Westcliffe in Custer County.*

*For more information contact Bob and Sue Hill at bob@pacapeace.org or visit www.pacapeace.org*

**Building  
Specials**

<b>30'x40'x10'</b>	starting at	<b>\$8,995</b>
<b>42'x56'x13'</b>	starting at	<b>\$16,595</b>
<b>60'x80'x15'</b>	starting at	<b>\$29,695</b>

Multiple United States Locations!  
www.clearybuilding.com

Picture shown not priced in ad. Crew travel required over 50 miles. Local building code modifications extra.

**Specializing in the manufacturing, shipping and**

