

From

Wish to REALITY

By Kathy Peterson

They came from four states and traveled as much as 750 miles to what most would call a remote ranch about 20 miles outside of Ellijay, Georgia. With empty trailers in tow, vehicles moved deliberately along winding roads and followed wooden, stoic, llama-shaped signs that were secured high on utility poles and trees along the way. Inside each vehicle excitement built, as conversations bubbled with discussion about the impending destination and the extraordinary day ahead. When there were no more signs to follow and no road left to travel, they had arrived at the gates of Pearson Pond Ranch.



Their visit had been planned and anticipated for weeks. Every little detail had been impeccably thought out. Such was the beginning of a day where every "by invitation only" participant would be a winner and all who shared the day would take away special memories of a unique gathering.

Tracy Pearson was the brainchild of this special day. In the beginning she wondered if it would be a good idea to have the event. But, as she dis-



cussed her idea with friends, she realized there was no downside. She decided to have the event, but not to publicize it. Her friends advised differently - hence, this article.

On August 12, 2006, 21 ALSA youth ranging in age from 8 to 17, accompanied by family and friends, converged upon the ranch. Tracy personally greeted each youth, while Jack Pearson (a.k.a. Chef Jack) prepared a tasty lunch at the nearby covered pavilion that houses a monstrous stone pit grill. The youth entered a large, open-air barn filled down the center with stalls that held 35 male llamas each youth could "interview" and then choose three or four they would like to



own. These were beautiful animals, many of them show quality.

The air bubbled with noise, excitement and anticipation as each youth made their way through the stalls, one by one. Sometimes there was an immediate connection with a particular llama; however, each youth had been asked to choose several favorites, listed in order of preference. After about three hours, all lists were complete. That's when the fun really began.

With lists in hand, the youth, relatives and friends boarded a large, white tram covered by a fringed, blue awning and rode to the top of a rocky hill covered with huge trees that shaded the pavilion underneath. Chef Jack greeted everyone and told them to "dig in" as they heaped their plates with Jack's bounty. While they enjoyed their tasty lunches, the pavilion buzzed as youth, friends and family talked about the llamas they liked most. Then they waited for the next step. Having received invitations to the event, they knew what was about to happen.

Jack welcomed everyone. He talked about how, over the years, he and Tracy had overheard youth at ALSA shows discussing Pearson Pond's llamas and how they wished they could own one of them. Most thought they never would; however, this would be the day their wishes would come true. Was there a hitch? Of course! That was the part Tracy would explain.

Tracy held a box with pieces of paper numbered 1 through 21. Each



youth would draw a number that would determine the order they would be allowed to select one llama from their list. Some shouted with glee as they got low numbers; others groaned when they didn't. Even so, the anticipation grew as everyone headed back

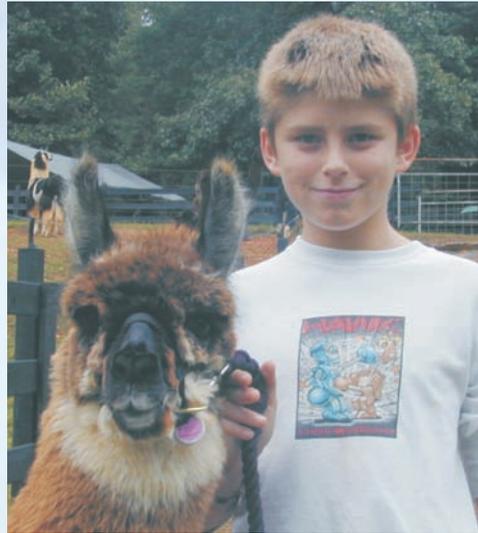


to the pavilion for the grand finale: selection of one llama by each youth.

Organized chaos ensued as the selection process began. The youth holding the first ticket selected their llama. Family and friends were just as thrilled as the youth. The process was repeated 20 more times until each was the new owner of a llama. It was fun watching each proud new owner take their llama from his stall and greet the crisp afternoon that awaited them outside.

It's uncanny how sometimes things seem to work out perfectly and the very one all had feared would be disappointed is delighted in the end. That was precisely what happened on this magical day. The youth who had drawn number 21 got the llama he had first on his list. Almost unbelievable, but that's what happened!

Throughout the day, many photos were taken, with grand finale photos of



the youth, their llamas and families and Jack and Tracy. As Tracy put it, "We're taking photos so we will have special memories of today long after it has passed."

When all paperwork had been handled, each llama was loaded for travel by the Pearson Pond Ranch crew. Of course Tracy was right in the middle of it, ensuring everything was done just right. Then, one by one, the vehicles headed in the opposite direction, carrying happy youth, family and friends, pulling behind the now-occupied trailers that had arrived empty just a few hours before. As vehicles and trailers



in tow passed through the gates of Pearson Pond Ranch, a sense of calm and quiet joy surrounded them and their passengers.

Then once again they moved deliberately along winding roads, driving past llama-shaped signs resting on the utility poles and trees along the way. As each vehicle and trailer passed, the llama signs now seemed to be smiling, as though they understood a very special day had just ended - one where everyone was a winner.

