

Newsroom

Good Night's sleep

By Margaret Krueger of the Daily Times staff

ASHIPPUN - A town of Ashippun entrepreneur says her sheep can put you to sleep without counting them one-by-one or pulling the wool over your eyes.

Susan McCourt of Kerry Hills Farm counts on her sheep to give a good night's rest by providing an internal thermostat and no pressure points.

Her business of raising sheep and selling natural fiber products made from the wool is growing as people discover the benefits of making their beds with her handmade creations trademarked with names such as Soothe Ewe underquilts, Comfort Ewe comforters, Hug Ewe wool pillows, Snuggle Ewe quilt and pillow in one, and Support Ewe neck rolls.

She started sewing the products using wool batts over a year ago, and has been pleasantly surprised at how well they are selling on her kerryhillsfarm.com Internet site. Satisfied customers pleased with the comfort of wool have also spurred word-of-mouth sales.

"Wool is used all the time for bedding, but not in comfort form," she said. "That's what makes the products unusual. It's like lying under a cloud. Wool does not compact like feathers. Air circulates through the wool and maintains your body temperature so you never get overheated. We have even sold some in Florida and California, places where you would not think anyone would want a wool comforter."

McCourt hopes to attract the interest of medical doctors with customer claims that people with fibromyalgia and others who suffer chronic pain can benefit from her products. "I have gotten letters from people that say they haven't slept this well in years. They couldn't get comfortable before. Because of the air in the wool, there are no pressure points to cause pain."

After McCourt started getting comfort reports from consumers, her husband, Arthur, a semi-retired pharmacist, started doing a bit of research on why the underquilts and comforters worked so well to combat fibromyalgia and other pain.

According to Arthur McCourt, R.Ph., 90 percent of those with fibromyalgia suffer from joint pain, cold sensitivity and insomnia that cause difficulty falling asleep, frequent awakenings, inability to fall back to sleep, tossing and turning all night and early morning awakenings. "Wool has a natural resilience that is a function of the natural crimps or springiness found in the fibers and hair-like scales or burrs found in each wool fiber. These natural attributes create a weight support system," he notes on the business's Web site. "The natural fiber of wool delivers therapeutic warmth. This works together with your body to temporarily relieve pain and stiffness by relaxing your sore tight muscles and conforms to the contours of your body to help you fall asleep.

The Soothe Ewe underquilt distributes your weight to eliminate pressure points. By maintaining body temperature evenly, your body rids itself of the chemical byproducts that cause pain."

Fibromyalgia syndrome is a chronic, often disabling medical condition characterized by widespread body pain and uncontrollable fatigue. It is often accompanied by many other problems such as irritable bowel, headaches, sleep disorder, and cognitive impairments. Conditions that may fall into the same category of syndromes are chronic fatigue syndrome and myofascial pain syndrome.

He hopes to provide information about the wool bat products to doctors in the future, but he is currently on medical leave from his job at the Aurora Pharmacy at Pick n' Save in Watertown.

The sheep business was started after the couple, who lived in New Berlin, looked for a house with big windows and found one on Franklin Road. Shortly after moving here five years ago, cousins gave them two lambs to keep the lush green pastures in check on the 25-acre property. Susan, who had 30 years of experience in sales, wanted a new challenge. Arthur, who started Drug Emporium and used to own the Tobin Drug Store chain, was semi-retired. Kerry Hills Farm started as a hobby but is now a growing business that supplies lamb to the community and a variety of products from natural fibers. Susan looked for ways to profit from the sheep and started selling the raw wool, wool batting, washed wool, wool roving, spun wool and specialty wool.

"I used to wash wool in an old Maytag. Then I started using wool bats to make other products. Now we ship all over the country, but it is still a one-person business," said Susan McCourt, noting that she makes all of the products herself, by hand, and also does all the shipping.

Her workshop is an office built on the property by the former owner.

The wool batts are made into underquilts and comforters on a large table, using a sewing machine to make the duvet covers which are hand-tied. "I also make big pillow cases and have been known to make pillows while you wait," she said, explaining that pillows can be made to order, depending on the desired thickness.

The underquilts are made with three or five batts while a comforter usually has only one batt.

With the interest her wool products have generated, she is always looking for new ways to use the wool from their growing herd of 38 sheep, mostly Dorsets and crossbreeds. "I will give people what they want. I had a man come in, take off his boots and tell me he wanted wool insoles. So now I make those too. A lady wanted a lap robe for someone in a nursing home, so I have started making those. I made an underquilt to fit the recliner of a man who could not lay flat after back surgery. I can make anything out of wool," she said, eyeing her sewing machine but admitting she does not knit.

"If you like what you are doing, it will take you where you want to go," she said.

"It all fell into place."

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