

# **Using PR Events as a Training Opportunity**

## **By Laurie Mollin – Shangrila Llamas**

For the last 15 years we have brought llamas to Festival in the Park in Roanoke, Virginia. We do it for the children and for the general public to see what pretty, well groomed, well behaved llamas are like. They provide us with a tent and we bring panels.

We are there for three days, so we try to bring three different sets of llamas when possible. The weanlings are more fun and less intimidating for the children. But if we have a yearling female available we try to bring one to act as aunt and guarantee us a llama that will eat out of anyone's hand. By the end of the day they are all eating out of even the tiniest little hands. We utilize click and reward with targeting to keep it under control so there is not fighting over food and we can direct them to a specific child.



We have found that bringing a llama to either a show or a PR event can change your relationship with them and create a bond that you may never get on the farm. When they are away from home and their buddies you can become their security and their new best bud. You can take advantage of this to form a bond that often will last even when you get back home. If nothing else they have to get in a trailer and walk on lead.

Feeding them throughout the day and not forcing them to participate builds trust and makes it a pleasurable experience for them. If they decide to zone out or seem at all stressed we let them take a break until they want to be engaged again.

This year we brought a female who is the least friendly llama on the farm, but we had taken her to a show and she was very well behaved and easy to control, so we thought she would be a good Aunt to the other two less experienced females. She was an awesome PR llama. She would let anyone pet her whether they had food or not.



She even would stick her head through the panel for hugs.



Ironically Shangrila's Lots of Kisses is her name. And she would not give kisses until we brought her to the Festival. Now she is much better about letting me reach out to stroke her back and is generally easier to handle.

Shangrila's Cisco was to be picked up the next week and we had promised to do some clicker training so this was a perfect opportunity to get in some training time.



Our dear friend, Deirdre Martin who you see in most of the pictures (because I am taking the pictures) has been training Cisco for his future as a pack llama. She felt very confident that Cisco was stable enough to walk outside the pen. Normally we take them from the trailer to the pen and then back at the end of the day to take home. This way the llamas are protected from the crowds and it limits our liability. We did a trial run close to the pen with Deirdre leading and me watching their back and taking pictures.



Cisco did so well, we decided to see how he would do on a walk through the vendors.



It was a tight fit with tons of new stuff that Cisco had never seen. Though he was alert he seemed to be enjoying himself so we took him up steps, then down steps. He even climbed up the rock garden.



This willingness to follow Deirdre did not just happen. She took him on many walks up our logging trail, driveway and through the woods plus she trained him on our obstacle course on the farm. It was very satisfying for both of us to see all her work pay off. I wrote this article to encourage you all to get your llamas out in the public as often as possible. Seeing those little beaming faces makes it worth the effort and you end up with a better trained llama.