

Marie Goldman

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POINTS OF VIEW



Heartwarming to see animal lover Rebecca's business in finals of awards



Cllr Marie Goldman meets one of the alpacas at All Things Alpaca

Is there a better way to spend a sunny Thursday morning in February than wandering around an orchard with a small herd of alpacas and some lovely people on a little outing?

No? I didn't think so, which is just as well, because that's exactly what I did last week when I accompanied some City of Chelmsford Mencap service users, staff and volunteers as they visited All Things Alpaca at Lathcoats Farm in Beehive Lane.

All Things Alpaca is owned and run by lovely Chelmsford resident Rebecca Shipman, whose passion for animals has taken her around the world, including a year-long stint in South Africa experiencing all sorts of animals and wildlife.

Rebecca says she's always had a love of animals, even as a small child.

Having worked her way up to head of section at Colchester Zoo and then moving to Whipsnade Zoo just before Covid broke out, Rebecca realised that she really wanted to bring her love of animals closer to home, right into the heart of the city where she was born – and that's how she ended up creating All Things Alpaca.

There are seven gorgeous male alpacas in Rebecca's herd. They're all five to six years old, so still fairly young, considering that alpacas can live to anywhere between 15 and 20 years old.

Their fleece is beautifully soft to the touch. It gets shorn once a year and can be used for clothing. In fact, that's mainly what they were bred for in their native homes in and around the Andes mountain range that stretches along the west coast of South America.

But you won't find alpacas in the



All Things Alpaca is owned and run by Chelmsford resident, Rebecca Shipman, front row, second from the right, seen here with Cllr Marie Goldman and visitors from City of Chelmsford Mencap

PHOTOS: Cllr Marie Goldman

wild. They are an entirely domesticated animal, originally descended from the Vicuña (yeah – I hadn't heard of it either, but if you look it up, you'll see something that looks much like a taller, slimmer alpaca).

Rebecca offers various up-close-and-personal experiences with the alpacas.

When I visited, as well as leading them on a gentle stroll in the sunshine, we also got to give them a few hand-fed treats.

Having such a curious creature nibble from your palms was a joyful experience and it was wonderful to see the

smiles on the Mencap service users' faces. Well, most of them. Some were understandably a little wary of the alpacas who, while mainly mild-mannered, still have their quirks to watch out for and aren't averse to spitting at each other occasionally if they feel a little aggrieved about something.

Mind you, humans often do a lot worse to each other.

I asked Rebecca whether she hosted a lot of these sorts of visits. She said they often had groups coming along to see them, but the alpacas sometimes had some more unusual roles to play, including one memorable occasion when two of them were booked to be the entertainment at a wedding.

In the lull between the ceremony and the wedding breakfast, while

the happy couple were off taking photos, two of Rebecca's boys (whose names all begin with the letter 'P', by the way: Panda, Popcorn, Poncho...) kept the guests amused as they mingled with the crowd.

While alpacas are probably the biggest animal draw, Rebecca's growing business also includes donkeys, goats, guinea pigs, chickens, ducks, pigs, rabbits, rats and mice, all available to provide the animal-human interaction experience that so many of us loved as children and, if you're anything like me, continue to enjoy today.

It's heartwarming to see a Chelmsford resident doing so well with a business that they have built from scratch, with support, of course, from family, friends and lots of lovely volunteers, especially when you see

the smiles it puts on visitors' faces.

I was very pleased to hear that Rebecca is doing so well, in fact, that All Things Alpaca has made it through to the Essex Small Business of the Year finals, which will be awarded in April.

You can find out who else is in the final on the Essex Small Business Awards website at thesmallbusinessawards.co.uk/essexfinalists.

So, if you're passing along Beehive Lane any time soon, do check out All Things Alpaca, and then maybe stop for something delicious in the Lathcoats Farm café or shop.

You can find out more about All Things Alpaca experiences on their website at www.allthingsalpaca.co.uk.

Thanks, as always, for reading.
Marie

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