

## *A Mill Comes to Life Canadian Fine Fibre Works*

**In August 2001 Canadian Fine Fibre Works began its first customer production runs from their new, completely modern, first ever in Canada processing mill geared mainly to the processing of fine fibre products.**

Bob & Carrol Howard saw a need for commercial fibre development in both the Llama and Alpaca industries. Hence they undertook to “pioneer” this area with the purchase of about 50 head of geldings for fibre production. By contacting masses of knitting and craft shops across Canada, they soon had orders, in-house, for various yarns and products. “That’s when the wheel fell off the wagon” Bob states. After contacting dozens of mills across North America, it was evident that the orders could not be met. Some mills did not take it to the spun yarn stage, others had to blend wool, and others could not handle the volume, some only produced one size or type of yarn. The end result – either get in further (with a mill for their own processing) or get out. Knowing the amount of raw fibre available and the potential for finished yarn, they started searching for equipment for their own needs. With encouragement and pressure from their many associates in the Llama and Alpaca industry, the Howards soon had to expand their vision to a full fledged commercial state-of-the-art mill.

Selecting a mill was a bit of a challenge as many manufacturers across North America and Europe produce selected pieces of equipment but none could be found that would produce a complete line of equipment such as pickers, devegetators, dehairers, carders, draw frames, spinners and plyers, cone and skein winders, steamers and slub catchers. Then they contacted International Spinners in PEI. They had a full range of equipment and were more than willing to enhance, enlarge or modify their models to suit the Howard’s needs. It was a wise choice, with the machines proving their ability and reliability, excellent factory back up and

assistance, resulting in a great and lasting customer-manufacturer relationship.

With their mill on order, a new building was being constructed to house the facility in Peers, AB. Also, Howard’s daughter Shauna, and her husband Warren Pelz, became part owners and members of the operation.

When word got out on the forthcoming mill, people started sending us fibre even though the start-up date was 2 months or so away. By the time they started production, the Howards had over 5 months worth of raw fibre, and the mill was operating up to 20 hours per day, 6 days per week with a staff of 9.

Two conditions have somewhat slowed our output more than anticipated: the high degree of vegetation and the extremely long fibre (sometimes 14+ inches). That was fully expected as this mill accepts and processes fleeces that other mills cannot or will not accept.

To better serve this part of the industry and not sacrifice quality for quantity, 2 new machines are presently awaiting delivery – an enlarged capacity devegetating machine and a new production machine called a fibre-sizer which will take these long fleeces and cut them into processable lengths.

One of the most exciting aspects of the mill has been the huge support from not only the Llama and Alpaca industry, but also the Sheep (many types of special wool), Goat (Mohair), Cashmere, Muskox (Qiviut) and Bison industries as well. With literally hundreds of customers having toured the mill and observed the versatility of the machines, the Howards have been able to produce a great variety of needed products. Since the Howards are committed to being customer friendly and helpful, the imagination and creativity of their clients enhances the potential for products.

Some of the products the mill has produced for their customers include:

**Yarns:** all types sizes and plies which have been used in everything from fine woven cloth to bulky knit garments.

**Rovings:** straight from the carder for hand spinners or through the spinners with a slight twist for bulky knitting, rugs and locker-hooking.

**Batts:** for the home and commercial quilter, insulated vest makers, hand felters or made up into complete duvets by the mill.

**Felt:** clothing weight and quality felt, as well as felt for boot liners, insoles, saddle pads, mitt liners, vest insulation, mattress pads (for the bed ridden), pet pads, decorative felt using various colours, or yarn or other interesting objects felted into it. The list goes on and on.

**Washing and dehairing only:** popular for those who want a top quality fleece for hand carding and spinning.

**Custom Dyeing:** complete fleece or skein (rainbow) dyeing for colourful yarns or decorative yarns with several plies of different colours. Also felt dyeing is very popular.

The response to this mill has been overwhelming. New and exciting ideas and projects are being brought to the Howards continually.

The mill also offers custom duvets and woven material made out of the individual customer’s own fibre. The Howards are now arranging for the production of high quality, light weight dress socks, both with customers own fibre or co-oped upon request.

In September the Howards will open a craft store in conjunction with the mill. As a bonus for their customers, they will display and sell articles made up from mill products on a consignment basis. Being on the Yellowhead tourist route (Edmonton to Jasper) and not far off the Alaska Highway route, they look forward to a busy next summer working with Alberta Tourism as a tourist destination. As well, the Howards will be adding an e-commerce section to their website so those customers North America-wide can purchase products on-line.

**Operating under the motto of “Customer Friendly” has certainly led to the expansion and diversification of the mill in 1 short year. Having the array of equipment available has been a great asset, but the greatest asset of all is – their friendly customers.**

**Bob and Carrol Howard  
Box 230**

**Peers, Alberta  
Canada T0E 1W0  
780-693-2299**

**themill@telusplanet.net  
info@canadianfinefibreworks.com  
www.canadianfinefibreworks**

**CANADIAN FINE FIBRE WORKS CELEBRATES  
ITS FIRST YEAR ANNIVERSARY!  
WITH AND OPEN HOUSE ON SEPT 28/02  
EVERYONE WELCOME!!**