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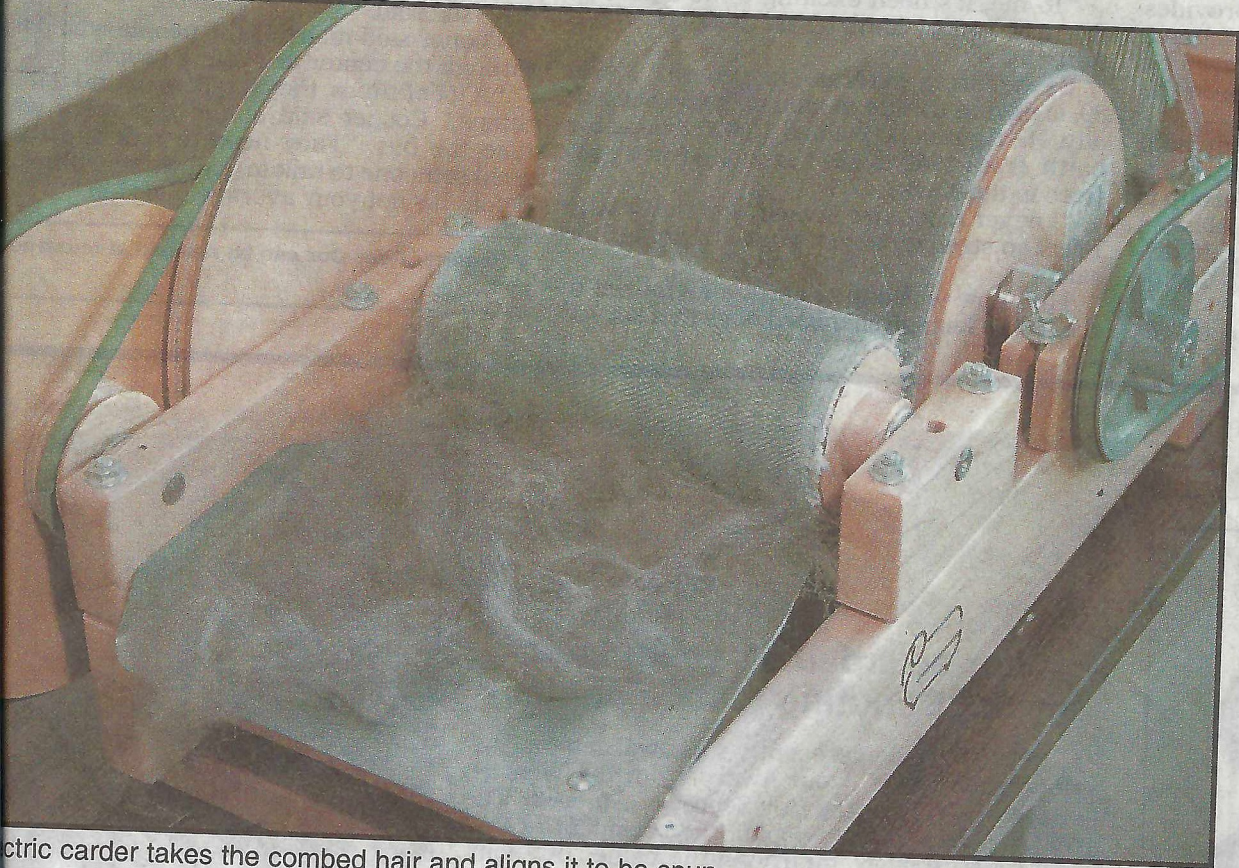
spin



Old English sheepdog mittens and an Afghan hound headband are some of the items Charilyn Cardwell has made.



Rilyn Cardwell spins yarn of Samoyed hair on her traditional Ashford spinning wheel from New Zealand as her Old English sheepdog, Dudley, watches. When sheepdog hair is needed for her "Woofers Wearables," Dudley donates.



Electric carder takes the combed hair and aligns it to be spun.

Suggested Reading

Interested in doing it yourself? Yes, there's a how-to book for this:

"Stop vacuuming and start knitting," exhort authors Kendall Crol-ius and Anne Montgomery on the cover of their book "Knitting With Dog Hair." It retails for \$10.95.



DOG HAIR:

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save every precious hair from her frequent brushings.

"I heard you can have things made from it," he says.

Still, it wasn't until after his faithful companion died at age 12, a couple of years ago, that Rundquist sought out Cardwell and her spinning wheel.

So far, for his foresight, he's got a Tekla sweater and scarf, as well as mittens, hats and headbands, all made in the same familiar shade. For him and others who knew Tekla, Rundquist said, each article provides a comforting reminder of a good friend.

"It has a lot of meaning," he said. "(It's) a physical means of remembrance."

It was the beauty and, let's face it, the sheer volume of dog hair that got Cardwell started weaving in the first place. About 20 years ago, while brushing her Old English sheepdog for dog shows, she first got the thought that she shouldn't just be throwing all that perfectly good hair away.

"I thought, 'Surely I can learn to spin this,' " she says now, as though it was a natural train of thought. Next thing, she'd taken local weaving classes and was on her way to her current specialty, making dog-hair items for others.

In her home workshop, Cardwell displays several dog-hair sweaters as well as a silk and Samoyed vest that looks very much like an angora knit.

"It just does that," she says of the attractive halo of fuzz. Every sweater is luxuriously fluffy, smells fresh and clean — and is warm enough to function as skiing outerwear.

Although the material is plentiful and the finished products luxurious, dog-hair clothing isn't for everyone.

Some just find the idea "a complete turn-off," Cardwell says.

Others misunderstand the process. Over

What's Alaska's most relentlessly renewable resource?

If you're a dog owner, you may suspect the answer is blowing in the wind — not to mention coating your couch, covering your carpet and clinging to your clothing.

Dog hair is everywhere.

There's no one out there officially tallying pounds produced per pooch. But let's play with some numbers. In Anchorage alone, Animal Control estimates there are about 50,000 dogs. Even figuring a conservative ounce of hair is shed per dog, per day, that still

would equal a whopping 3,125 pounds of dog hair daily.

Palmer weaver uses dog hair to create wearable memories

Why not do something constructive with it?

Palmer weaver Charilyn Cardwell is doing her part. The retired middle school teacher has made a

second career and enjoyable lifestyle as a weaver of what she calls "exotic fibers" — most of which are what the rest of us would call "shed dog hair."

Yes, there is a market for this sort

Cardwell claims no shortage of clients willing to pay for her to turn their collection of dog hair into hats, headbands, mittens, caps and sweaters. She's got her own business to do just that, "Woofers Wearables."

Anchorage resident Larry Rundquist is one of Cardwell's most frequent customers. On impulse, he'd been saving up hair from his golden retriever/Samoyed mix, Tekla, for almost her entire life.

Why?

"She was a real good dog," Rundquist said. And a beautiful one, too. Due to her mixed parentage, Tekla had an unusual blend of colors in her coat, a sort of light tan that made her stand out. Rundquist's urge was to

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Items made with pets' fur are as soft as angora

Clients bring Cardwell big brown garbage bags full of their dog's fur (combed, not clipped, so she has full fibers to work with) and a few weeks or months later, she hands them the finished products. The cost: from \$35 for a headband to \$500 for an elaborate sweater.

nearly 20 years of weaving, knitting and displaying dog-hair items, Cardwell has had to correct more than one casual observer who thought that what she did with the dog hair somehow involved, well, dispensing with the original owner. Or, as she puts it, "I had a couple of people think I killed dogs!"

Not necessary. As anyone who ever has brushed up against a dog knows, the animals give up their, um, exotic fibers pretty generously.

Cardwell thinks it clarifies things to describe the process at its most basic.

"It's recycling," she says. For some reason, men seem to take to the idea more readily than women.

Clients bring her big brown garbage bags full of their dog's fur (combed, not clipped, so she has full fibers to work with) and a few weeks or months later, she hands them the finished products. The cost: from \$35 for a headband to \$500 for an elaborate sweater.

The finished products, "like any fine washable," shouldn't be machine-washed and should be put out flat and reshaped to dry, says Cardwell, who compares a dog-hair sweater to those made with angora.

"It does shed some," she acknowledges. Before you snicker, so do angora and mohair, which, by the way, come from rabbits and

goats. As the recent book "Knitting With Dog Hair" counsels: "Better a sweater from a dog you know and love than from a sheep you'll never meet."

In her home workshop recently, two brown garbage bags awaited processing — one filled with Samoyed, another holding hair from a Norwegian elkhound/German shepherd mix.

Cardwell will begin the process by getting the hair processed, washing it so that the finished product won't be filled with dirt or hounded by unpleasant odors. This is where the much-feared "dog smell" disappears — "as long as your dog doesn't wear it," Cardwell likes to say.

Next, she cards the hair, pulling it through the metal wires of a brushlike instrument that straightens out the fibers, preparing them to be spun into yarn.

Then she feeds the fibers to a spinning wheel, which twists them into familiar-looking yarn. Cardwell always makes two-ply yarn for durability. Most dog hairs she's worked with have spun beautifully, she says. The oils in dog furs such as Samoyed seem even better than lanolin for helping the fibers blend smoothly together. Any fibers that don't typically can be salvaged with the addition of a second fiber — like Samoyed or wool — to help keep the yarn's integrity.

Finally, Cardwell does all her own knitting. It's fulfilling to follow a project from fiber through to finished work, she said, but also time-consuming. Cardwell already has all the orders she can handle through the end of January.

"I used to read," she says. "My books are piling up."

Her schedule doesn't promise to open up anytime soon. Cardwell's most recent client is a business with an abundance of exotic fibers: the Alaska Zoo.

Cardwell made her first camel-hair item for Mary Segelhorst, an Anchorage woman whose husband six years ago gave the zoo a 1,000-pound Bactrian camel named Boris as her Christmas present. Camels don't conveniently fit in closets, of course, so Segelhorst commissioned a camel hair vest as her memento.

It was she who this summer connected Cardwell with the zoo, which began carrying Cardwell's camel items, made from brushings from zoo camels Boris and Tula.

The camel-hair yarn skeins, earrings and mittens have been flying off gift shop shelves, store manager Nancy Smith said. "We can barely keep them in stock." The last order of seven pairs of mittens that came in took weeks and were priced at \$50; almost every one was sold within a day, Smith said.

"They've been well-received, and they're very warm."

Seeing the quality of the yarns and products also has warmed her to the concept of unusual fiber sources, Smith said — even dog.

"When I first heard about it, I thought, 'Oh, that sounds kind of morbid,' she said. "But it grows on you more and more."

■ Reporter Sonya Senkowsky can be reached at ssenkowsky@adn.com. Charilyn Cardwell of Woofers Wearables can be reached at 745-4618.