

LAKE PLACID NEWS

Lamb Watch

North Country School students monitor pregnant ewes overnight



North Country School ninth-graders Cocona, left, and Arden use a towel to dry off a white ewe — one of two twin lambs, a male and a female, born around 6:30 p.m. Thursday Feb. 18. The birth marked the beginning of the school's lambing season. (Provided photo)

LAKE PLACID — North Country School interns Hania and Melody dropped off a dinner to ninth-grader Arden around 6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 18. She wasn't in the cafeteria because she's a day student, and she was on Lamb Watch that night.

“The interns were like, ‘Hey, one of the ewes is showing signs of lambing. You might want to get up here,’” she said.

Arden rushed through the rest of her meal and headed to the barn. It was full of people, including the interns, Barn Manager Erica Burns and fellow ninth-grader Cocona. As she opened the door, she was shushed, like a librarian would do.

“I walked in quietly and shut the door quietly, and everybody was standing by the fence besides Erica and Hania, who were helping the mother,” she said. *“Melody was taking notes, documenting everything that was happening.”*

A black ram had already been born, but Arden made it in time to see her first lamb birth — a white ewe. Twins. In her mind, she gave them the same names as her twin siblings, Zaide and Johanna.



North Country School ninth-grader Edie keeps warm in her sleeping bag during an overnight Lamb Watch in the barn. (Provided photo)

“They’re SO cute,” Arden said Monday, Feb. 22.

This was the beginning of lambing season at North Country School. In all, 10 ewes were impregnated by the school’s ram, Phantom, last September. And the school is bringing back a tradition after a two-year absence, Lamb Watch.

During Lamb Watch, ninth-graders take turns sleeping in the barn overnight — only three at a time during the coronavirus pandemic. They’re in sleeping bags on the hay-strewn floor and set their alarm several times a night to check on the ewes to see if they’re showing signs of giving birth.

“Every ewe is different,” Burns said. *“Oftentimes, she’ll get quite restless. She’ll spend some time building a nest, which involves her kind of pawing at the hay and digging around in the hay.”*

If a ewe looks like it will begin lambing, the students call Burns on the radio to monitor the situation and help with any births.



North Country School Barn Manager Erica Burns, left, talks with people in the barn after the first of the school's 10 ewes gave birth on Thursday, Feb. 18. The ewe mother had twin lambs, a black ram and a white ewe. (Provided photo)

“We’re learning a lot about respecting the environment, which in general is one of the basic things about North Country,” Arden said. “And being in there to learn not only about the sheep but the entire process.”

Students learn about biology with Lamb Watch, but lessons about the food supply are also reinforced. The school has extensive gardens and other livestock, such as chickens and turkeys, which are harvested and served to students, faculty and staff at the school throughout the year. The lambs are no different. Most, if not all, will be processed and put on the menu in dishes such as Greek-style gyros.

“Typically, I send them (to be processed) in November,” Burns said. “And that’s because we don’t really have the space to winter them. If they’re born in April or May, I would still need to send them in November.”

The lambing season is earlier this year, but that’s by design. The gestation period is about 152 days, or five months, and the typical lambing season at

North Country School is in April.

“I am attempting to increase the production of my flock, without actually increasing my flock,” Burns said. “I bred the ewes earlier last year ... in hopes that they will all still get pregnant and have twins at least a couple months earlier.”



North Country School students check out the sheep in the barn. (Provided photo)

The earlier the lambs are born, the heavier they will become and the more meat they'll produce.

“We have some really beautiful field spaces here, so I'll put them out and they'll eat grass all summer long,” Burns said. “And then I'll bring them up into the barn and I'll finish them coming into November, which means they'll get a little bit of grain and I'll monitor their weights and try to get them to be good, healthy market lambs.”

North Country School is a co-ed boarding school for students in grades 4 through 9, with enrollment from around the world. The 220-acre campus

is located on state Route 73 outside of Lake Placid on the side of the highway opposite the Olympic Sports Complex at Mount Van Hoevenberg.

“The kids get to spend so much time with those animals,” School Director Matt Smith said, *“which is a big part of our curriculum.”*

Students are required to do daily barn chores, which includes taking care of the sheep, chickens, turkeys, goats and horses. But Lamb Watch is only for ninth-graders. Smith calls it a *“senior privilege.”*

“It’s helpful for them from an educational perspective, but they also learn how to be a member of a community and how to help out a community,” Smith said.

To learn more about North Country School, visit online at

<https://northcountryschool.org>.
