

National Llama Appreciation Day

By Jane Hamilton-Merritt, Chair, Llama Promotion Committee

In January 2017, the Llama Promotion Committee was chartered and approved by the GALA Board to conduct national campaigns to educate the general public about the virtues and history of llamas. Over the years, the alpaca community has conducted numerous national campaigns. It seemed that the llama community had not done so. Thus, the creation of the Llama Promotion Committee.

Why, you might ask, did June 21 become National Llama Appreciation Day?

The Committee, in its quest to engage the public in learning more about llamas, hit on the idea of designating one day as National Llama Appreciation Day. Then the question became which date would be most appropriate?

Weather had to be considered in finding a date. Winter was out. August and September were out because it is usually too hot. July is often hot as well. November and December were out because of possible nasty weather, of short supply of daylight, and of holiday activities. May is crowded with graduations and end of year parties which involve entire families. Probably best to choose a date when school is not in session to allow youth to participate and help with events.

Then the IDEA struck me that we should consider the Summer Solstice, officially June 21, as a meaningful date for Appreciating Llamas both in North America and in the Andes, ancestral home of our llamas. There probably is not one

best date but a date that has historical and cultural meaning assists in establishing this recognition and celebration as legitimate, interesting, and worthwhile.

Those of us who are interested in the Andean peoples and culture are aware

of the significances of solstices in their lives. June 21 in the Northern Hemisphere is our summer solstice; in the Southern Hemisphere it is their winter solstice.

Aware that GALA Board Member Mike Sheridan had worked in the high Andes, I asked him if he thought identifying June 21 as National Llama Appreciation was a valid and good idea. He answered in the affirmative and provided this additional information from his experiences, augmented with information from a Wikipedia listing.

“A few years ago I participated in the solstice festival of Inti Raymi in Ibarra, northern Ecuador, after driving down from Pasto, Colombia. It was celebrated on June 21. I have also taken one of my llamas to a non-Inca (new age?) solstice festival in Rochester, NY a few years ago.

Inti Raymi (Quechua for "sun festival") is a religious ceremony begun by the Inca Empire to honor the god Inti (Quechua for "sun"), one of the most venerated deities in Inca religion. The festival celebrates the return of the sun to his dominance of the skies in the Andes at the winter solstice. The shortest days of the year in regions south of the equator

occur in the Gregorian months of June and July.

The Inca chief Sapa Inca Pachacuti instituted the Inti Raymi in 1412 to celebrate the appearance of the sun in the New Year in the Andes of the Southern Hemisphere. The ceremony also relates to the origin legends of the Incas. The festival lasted for nine days and was filled with colorful dances and processions, as well as animal sacrifices to thank Pachamama (Earth Mother) and to ensure a good cropping season. The last Inti Raymi with the Inca Emperor's presence was celebrated in 1535, after which it was banned by authorities until modern times.

The official date in Cusco, Peru for Inti Raymi is June 24. Beginning in 1944 a theatrical representation of the Inti Raymi takes place on June 24 of each year at Saksaywaman, an Inka pavilion located two kilometers from its original celebration site in central Cusco.

Inti Raymi is still celebrated in indigenous cultures throughout the Andes. Celebrations involve music, colorful costumes all-night dancing in intricate conga-line spirals, and the sharing of food.”

Considering the importance of June 21 in both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres and the cultural meaning to the Andean tribal peoples who are the shepherds of llamas in South America, the Committee settled on June 21 which we considered an auspicious date for everyone to Appreciate Llamas every year.

