

Lots of whirrs and beeps and bangs and buzzes create surround-sound at the Maker's Faire in Happy Valley, PA!

by Fyllis Hickman, Travel Columnist! Photos by Victor Block!

Happy Valley, Pennsylvania: A Town Worthy of a Truth in Advertising Award!

There is so much going on at the First Annual Maker's Faire at Axemann Brewery in Bellefonte, PA, covering multiple zones and floors, that it's easy to get distracted from discovering all there is there to do and see. It's a science fair, craft show and entertainment venue all rolled into one where makers and creators of – well, just about everything – showcase what they do, how they do it, why they do it – and then invite you to do it as well. Or at least interact with the products of their inventiveness.

Toy cars racing each other to their demise; numerous craft, coloring, and painting exhibits; model trains circling multiple tracks; lessons in throwing a boomerang. Wanna learn how to design a t-shirt, create stained glass, construct jewelry or pottery? Perhaps try your hand at woodworking, soldering or lacquering? Make a puppet and then watch it perform? Someone is there to help you craft your own masterpiece.

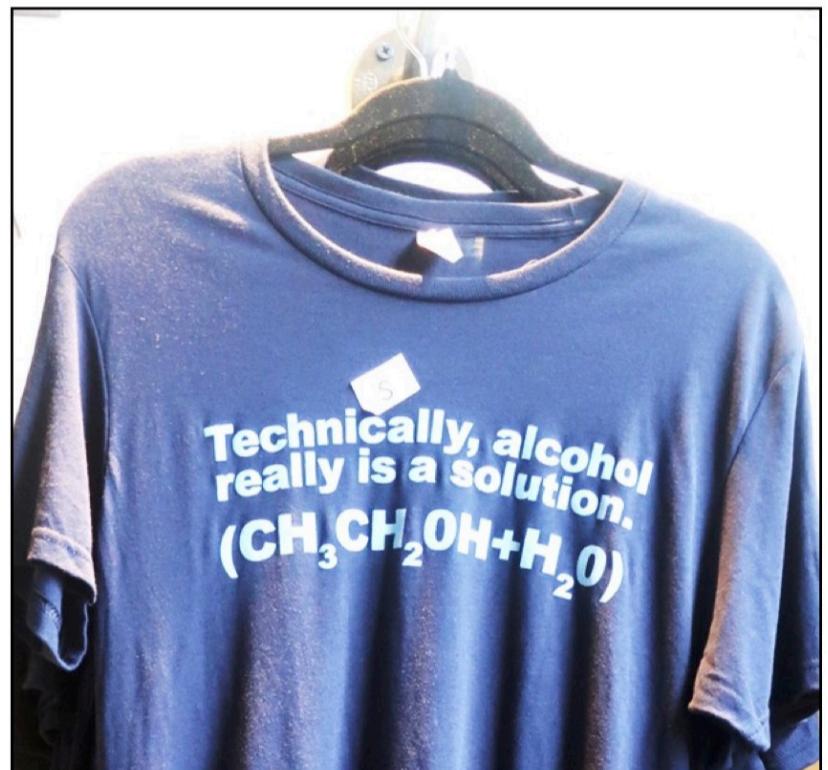


Fyllis Hickman
Travel Columnist

A DIZZYING AMOUNT OF ACTION AND ACTIVITY ABOUNDS AT THE MAKER'S FAIRE IN HAPPY VALLEY, PA!

An artist wearing a "Make Everything" t-shirt encapsulates the whole experience. If you can visualize it, build it, assemble it, interact with it, you're in the right place. Of course, there are LEGO creations of every conceivable size and design. Kinetic toys ascend, descend and spin around copious mounds of tracks. And if you want to know how a pinball machine works, there are about a dozen with which to test your skills – and satiate your curiosity. Just be careful where you walk – you don't want to trip over one of the roving robots with whom you may be sharing space. Not surprisingly, this was the first ever of what assuredly will now be an annual event.

From robots underfoot to alpacas in your face – begging for a neck rub. Welcome to the Bald Eagle Valley Alpaca Ranch. Also a donkey with a sign that says: "I'm cute but I bite." A separate warning for the alpacas – they spit, though I unfortunately chose to ignore that caveat. The eleven sheep came without any cautionary preamble. But all were great fun to be around – and being able to pet a three-week-old, cuddly alpaca brings forth smiles usually reserved for human babies. I had to fight off a three-year-old actual small person. I'm not proud of that but there are priorities and at that moment, the baby alpaca won.



T-shirts at Big Spring Spirits! Photo by Victor Block.



Adorable alpacas at a ranch in Happy Valley, PA!
Photo by Victor Block.



Sharing floor space with robots at the Maker's Faire in Happy Valley, PA! Photo by Victor Block.

OOOHS AND AHS PROLIFERATE AT THE BALD EAGLE VALLEY ALPACA RANCH IN HAPPY VALLEY, PA!

Owner Ann Taylor is very protective of her brood. She got bored teaching to test scores and started a new career caring for different kinds of kids – 12 alpacas, 11 sheep and 3 donkeys. And a very productive brood it is. All kinds of yarn of every color and texture come from the residents. Towels, shawls, caps, socks and even irresistible stuffed animals so soft I literally cuddled up with them on the spot.

All that intellectual stimulation at the Maker's Faire and canoodling with furry animals at the Ranch calls for some refreshment of an equally unusual nature. Welcome to Big Spring Spirits – literally home to a big spring, designated as the best-tasting water in the state by the Pennsylvania Rural Water Association – and the only distillery that uses it. It is also the first distillery in Pennsylvania to be LEED certified, a bulwark of green sustainability, sourcing from local farmers and artisans, whenever possible.

BIG SPRING SPIRITS IN HAPPY VALLEY, PA OFFERS HAND-MADE COCKTAILS USING PURIFIED WATER AND LOCALLY SOURCED INGREDIENTS!

But that's not why you visit Big Spring Spirits. You visit because they brew all their own cocktails – and they offer a taste of a house favorite as you sit down. And because they have flights of a wide variety of unrecognizable concoctions using vodka, gin, bourbon, whisky, tequila and rum. Multiple flavors of every liquor in inventive creations with tasting notes that read like a Pulitzer Prize-winning alcohol entry.

You visit because yes, much to my surprise, the Peanut Butter and Jelly cocktail actually tastes like peanut butter and jelly! And don't even get me started on the Salted caramel. And to add to the fun vibe permeating the tasting room are posters such as "Tequila – the only thing standing between me and a nervous breakdown," and "When I read about the evils of drinking, I gave up reading." Makes Happy Valley even that much happier – if that's possible!

For more information, visit <https://happyvalley.makerfaire.com>; <https://www.facebook.com/AnnCaruthersTaylor>; <https://www.bigspringspirits.com>.



The author up close and personal with a baby alpaca!
Photo by Victor Block.



So much to see and do at Happy Valley's Maker's Faire!
Photo by Victor Block.



Savoring flights of hand-crafted cocktails at Big Spring Spirits in Happy Valley, PA! Photo by Victor Block.