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COMMUNITY



A Northampton Township family that breeds rare Italian sheep dogs will compete at the Westminster Dog Show this year, the first time for both breed and family.

PANDIA

CH Pandia dell' Albera SP

HEAD OF THE HERD



TINIA

By LIZ JOHNSON
CORRESPONDENT

It's hard to say what turns a family of traditional dog lovers into exotic dog lovers. For the DeFalcises of Northampton Township, it was a picture in a magazine.

In 1995, Donna and Stephen DeFalcis were recently married, blending children and dogs into a single family.

"We were looking for something a little different after our golden retriever passed," Donna explained.

She came across a picture in a dog magazine of an Italian sheep dog called a Bergamasco, named after the Alpine region from which it originated. It was an advertisement placed by an English breeder.

"You've got to remember, it was 1995. There was no Internet, no Google translator," said Donna DeFalcis.

It took the couple a while to even figure out how to dial out overseas, said Donna, who teaches special education in Philadelphia.

Still, she was on a mission. By the end of the summer, the British breeder had connected them with the Italian breeder who sent them a male puppy named Sauno.

The following summer, the family made a trip to meet the breeder and came home with a female puppy named Jae.

"I knew absolutely nothing about



Donna and Stephen DeFalcis traveled to Italy over the summer with Tinia (CH Tinea dell' Albera SP) for the World Dog Show. At right, Donna poses with Nemes (CH Nemestrinus dell' Albera SP).

breeding. I was just a pet owner who loved dogs," said Donna.

At first, she started showing the dogs in rare breed shows. Then, in 1998, they moved to a home off Bridgetown Pike with enough property that they could breed them.

"And it just snowballed from there. It became an addiction," said Donna.

This year, they have three of their

dogs entered in the Westminster Dog Show, held at Madison Square Garden in New York City on Monday and Tuesday.

Bergamascos are one of four new breeds being judged in this year's herding category, and seven new breeds overall, at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show, according to the show's Web site.

The DeFalcises are the first American breeders of the Bergamascos and started the Bergamasco Sheepdog Club of America. There are now four approved U.S. breeders in the club,

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



WHOPE

CH Whope dell' Albera SP



Donna said.

Last year it was recognized by the American Kennel Club, said Donna.

"This breed is over 2,000 years old. It's an old soul breed with an absolutely wonderful temperament," she said. "They go with the flow of the family. Your energy level is their energy level."

Like many herding dogs, they're incredibly bright and capable of a complex vocabulary, said Donna.

"They respond better when you speak in full sentences," said Donna.

"You need to explain, give them a reason for why or what they're doing."

They're also great around children, intuitively knowing how close to get, which has made for great therapy dogs in her classroom, she said.

"Just yesterday I had an autistic student and my female insisted on lying next to him. He kept pushing her away. Eventually he got tired and she just stayed there with him," Donna said.

On the Web silverpastori.com

On TV: 140th Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show

- Monday, 8 to 11 p.m. on CNBC: Hound, Toy, Non-Sporting, Herding Groups
- Tuesday, 8 to 11 p.m. on USA: Sporting, Working, Terrier Groups and Best in Show