



Necklaces from Ecuador made out of Tagua, also known as ivory-nut, are displayed at Global Hands, a fair trade store in downtown Lake Geneva.

Lake Geneva store is Going Global

By Julie A. Jacob

Pamela Ellis' shop, Global Hands, is aptly named.

In her serene, earth-toned store tucked just off Main Street in Lake Geneva, pretty cotton shifts sewn in Nepal are draped on racks; soft alpaca wool scarves and hats from Peru are displayed on a table; colorful embroidered pillows from Pakistan are stacked on top of a bookcase, and geometric earrings and necklaces from Ecuador are arrayed on a shelf.

Hand-carved, wooden giraffes — 7 feet tall, mind you — peek out from a corner. The store smells pleasantly of palm oil candles scented with essential oils of lavender and cinnamon.

The information cards thumbtacked to the shelves, though, reveal why her shop is special. These cards show pictures of smiling men and women from Ecuador,

HIDDEN GEMS

Guatemala, Kenya and other countries who have made the items she sells by working for livable

wages in decent working conditions using methods that are environmentally sustainable. This model, known as fair trade, helps people in developing countries learn business skills and support themselves and their families. For them, working in a fair trade business is their ticket to education and a better life.

"Anything that customers buy goes toward feeding people," Ellis said. "Kids can go to school."

Ellis worked for many years as a florist and horticulturist, but she became interested in the fair trade movement after she attended a church presentation at which a Racine Journal-Times reporter (Mary Beth Danielson of Maya-Works' story is on Page 26) talked about traveling to South America and bringing back fair trade goods to sell.

This inspired Ellis to help organize fair trade expos in Burlington. The fairs were successful, but Ellis felt she could accomplish much more by opening her own shop.

She opened Global Hands in 2007. She chose Lake Geneva because, as she noted, it attracts 1.5 million visitors a year from the Chicago area. Business was good the first year, she said, but after the recession hit she had a few lean years before business bounced back.

She buys most of her goods from fair trade-certified wholesalers. Her store not only helps women halfway around the world; some of the goods she sells help women here in the United States, too. For instance, she sells soups produced by the Denver-based Women's Bean Project, which teaches business skills to impoverished women.

Although she sells an eclectic mix of clothing, jewelry, handbags, candles, coffee, tea and chocolate, she has two basic rules regarding her inventory. First, the items must



PHOTOGRAPHS BY KEVIN POIRIER
Global Hands owner Pamela Ellis, left, and her daughter, Lindsay Loth, who is also the store's general manager, make a good team.

be made in a way that meets fair trade standards. Second, except for some gifts and household décor items, she only sells things that can be used, worn or eaten.

"I like things to have a purpose," said Ellis.

Popular items include jewelry carved from the nut of the tagua palm tree, colorful soapstone animal figurines, candle votives made from Himalayan salt crystals, fabric handbags and organic coffee and tea.

If you go

Store: Global Hands

Address: 270 Broad

St., Lake Geneva

Phone: 262-248-6920

Website: www.

globalhandsfairtrade.com

Hours: 10 a.m. to 6

p.m. Monday through

Saturday; 11 a.m. to 5

p.m. Sunday

Her daughter, Lindsay, who graduated from college last year, works in the store with her and will take over when Ellis retires in a few years. Because Global Hands' customers range in age from early 20s to 60s, Ellis relies on her daughter to choose items that appeal to younger customers.

The best part of owning her store, she said, is knowing she is helping people by selling the items they make.

Gesturing to a display of multi-colored headbands from India, Ellis noted, "eight people are eating and going to school by making these headbands."

The hardest part of running a shop, she said, is the constant cycle of ordering, pricing and re-stocking items.

Her advice to any woman considering opening her own business: "be patient, upbeat, and positive" and realize that most businesses have cycles of busy seasons and slow ones.

For Ellis, owning Global Hands is not just about running her own business, it's about doing her part to give a helping hand to women who are striving to improve their lives.

"We have to help," said Ellis. "You know that poem about the starfish on the beach? You have to try to do what you can." ✂



With windows featuring inviting and colorful displays of fair trade items, Global Hands welcomes shoppers in downtown Lake Geneva.



Among the fair trade merchandise available for sale at Global Hands is this colorful flute from Indonesia.



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