

Ten Thousand Villages
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News Release

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For Immediate Release

Experiencing Fair Trade Up Close and Personal -- Local Marketing Manager Travels on Learning Tour to Visit Artisans in Asian Villages

RALEIGH, N.C., April 28, 2006 – “I’ve worked with Ten Thousand Villages for almost five years, and it is an incredibly fulfilling experience,” says Marketing and Volunteer Manager for the Raleigh store, Caroline Smith. “But it wasn’t until my recent visit to meet artisans in India and Bangladesh that I was able to connect with how artisans are truly impacted by their fair trade relationship with Ten Thousand Villages and the strong bond we have. Now I want to share that story with the people in our community.”

Smith will do just that at 1:00 p.m., Saturday, May 13, as she presents “Insights from Abroad: Artisan Stories from India and Bangladesh,” at the store in Cameron Village. “Sharing the stories of artisans and their life experiences is integral to the mission of Ten Thousand Villages,” she says. “Each product we sell is made by a person who is important to us. My recent trip underscores this critical aspect of who we are and validates our claim that we personally know the stories and names of the people we work with.”

Ten Thousand Villages hosts annual learning tours where store managers and staff connect with artisans through visits to their workshops and homes. The 14 tour participants this year from Raleigh; Salt Lake City, Utah; Kitchener, Ontario and points in between left for a 21-day trip on January 29 to meet artisans and learn first-hand how fair prices and consistent orders from Ten Thousand Villages improve their lives. In previous years, other staff members from the Raleigh store have participated in learning tours to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, and India and Nepal.

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“As I sat and spoke with artisans in rural villages in Bangladesh and India, I realized how interconnected our world is,” Smith comments. “I met people who have the same dreams I do.”

One of the most interesting and satisfying aspects of the tour for Smith was hearing the success stories of artisans who saved enough money to start their own businesses or who were able to receive loans to buy a house. Working with Ten Thousand Villages, she says, enables them to feed, educate and clothe their families and realize their dreams.

She tells of one artisan group in particular, St. Mary's in Ahmadabad, India, in the western region of Gujarat, known for its textiles. Most of the women in the region already were skilled in embroidery. (Local custom requires they be able to make 50 skirts prior to marriage.) Many of these women are now part of an artisan group that hand sews beautiful tapestries and home décor items. “For one elderly widow I spoke to, it was truly a lifesaver,” Smith explains. “Although her husband had passed away, not only was she able to support herself and buy a house, but she also relies on St. Mary's for her social network. She told me, ‘I don't know what I'd do without St. Mary's.’”

The house that the widow was able to purchase is not extravagant by most peoples' definition, Smith explained, with two rooms and a dirt floor. But it is a great improvement, which makes them happy and hopeful, and sustains them personally and professionally, she added.

As Smith traveled the countryside, her group drove past textile mills and other places where people were most likely not receiving a fair wage for their work, which further drove home and illustrated the importance of her role. “Our connection with artisans helps to improve their lives in so many ways,” she says. “I could see how their work improves their self-esteem and personal growth. It's motivational for me, too. It makes me want sell more of their goods so we can place more orders, which creates more jobs and helps more people. It's a simple equation, but it requires a commitment on the part of our community, as well.”

Smith said that the community's commitment comes in the form of making the right choices and conscientious purchasing decisions. “Ten Thousand Villages gives the community an opportunity to shop where the intrinsic value of an item includes the welfare of the skilled artisans who make it,” she explains.

Shoppers at Ten Thousand Villages can experience the world through the hundreds of unique international home décor and gift items filling the store. Photos and stories displayed throughout the store also share the store's mission to market fairly traded products made by artisans in 32 countries.

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Smith's presentation on May 13 is part of the [World Fair Trade Day](#) celebration being held by Ten Thousand Villages. The Raleigh store will mark the occasion with a daylong celebration, which will include:

- 1:00 p.m.: Listen to Marketing and Volunteer Manager Caroline Smith as she presents, "Insights from Abroad: Artisan Stories from India and Bangladesh," during which she will tell of her recent learning tour, when she visited artisans from the region.
- 2:00 p.m. Experience the magic of African rhythm, performed by Mabinti and Teli Shabu of Djembe Fire. Playing traditional African instruments, Djembe Fire treats spectators to the vibrant rhythms of the entire continent.
- Participate in a fun Fair Trade Quiz. Customers completing the quiz receive 20% off their purchases for the day!
- Enjoy complimentary Fair Trade coffee, tea and chocolates throughout the day!

World Fair Trade Day is celebrated every second Saturday of May and is endorsed by the International Federation of Alternative Trade (IFAT), the global association of Fair Trade Organizations, comprised of 300 organizations from 70 countries around the world. This year, World Fair Trade Day calls on people to purchase more Fair Trade goods through Fair Trade stores and to encourage conventional companies to sell more Fair Trade products.

Caroline Smith is available to share experiences about her trip to India and Bangladesh. To request a presentation at your school, church, civic group or business, please contact her at (919) 821 1100 or caroline@villagesofraleigh.org.

About Ten Thousand Villages of Raleigh

[Ten Thousand Villages of Raleigh](#) is a non-profit, fair trade retail store located in the Cameron Village Shopping Center. Opened in 1995, the store is part of a network of nearly 100 fair trade stores across North America. The Raleigh store's principal wholesaler, [Ten Thousand Villages-U.S.](#), is the oldest and largest fair trade home décor and gift retailer in the United States, and a founding member of the [International Federation of Alternative Trade \(IFAT\)](#) and member of the [Fair Trade Federation \(FTF\)](#), both of which aim to improve the livelihood of disadvantaged people in developing countries and to change unfair structures of international trade. Ten Thousand Villages of Raleigh purchases products only from carefully chosen organizations that are members of the IFAT and FTF.

In 2005, Ten Thousand Villages-US received [Co-op America's People's Choice Award for Green Business of the Year](#). The award recognizes Ten Thousand Villages as a leader among businesses across the country committed to social and environmental responsibility.

About Fair Trade

Fair Trade contributes to the alleviation of poverty in developing regions of the world by establishing a system of trade that allows marginalized producers to gain access to developed markets. This system of trade builds on artisans'/producers' skills, enabling communities to play an active part in their own development and at the same time satisfying consumer demand in developed markets.