

Third world artisans benefit from Helping Hands

By Cydney Wilson

Helping Hands Handcrafts, a gift shop at 339 N. Cotner Blvd. opened in November 1981. Helping Hands sells items handcrafted in Third World countries and the profits are sent back directly to help the people in these developing countries.

Helping Hands orders its sales items from SERRV and MCC Self-Help Program. SERRV, which was originally an acronym for Sales Exchange for Refugee Rehabilitation Vocations, offers a market to artisans in a wide variety of situations in some fifty "developing" countries worldwide.

SERRV, an ecumenical church-related marketing program, was developed after World War II to help refugees and displaced persons in Germany. The long-term solution which SERRV hopes to offer is a more adequate income for the individuals who market these crafts.

The MCC Self-Help Program, similar to SERRV, is a relief and service agency supported by Mennonites and Brethren in Christ. Self-Help also provides machinery and sewing machines to villages in some areas of the Third World.

Mark-up on items from these two outlets include shipping, customs and overhead costs, but no profits. Stores similar to

Helping Hands have been set up across the United States and Canada and are supported by many different denominations. SERRV and Self-Help wish to preserve the artistic traditions of the area or country from which they came, not wishing to promote commercialism.

Helping Hands is staffed by volunteers and all of the profits are going toward refugee resettlement and to SERRV and Self-Help in order to buy more handcrafts.

The Jute Works of Bangladesh started with five or six people and now has expanded to 30 persons making up their staff group and 25,000 craftsmen. The Jute Works, which began by selling their wares to SERRV, now distributes to other companies in North America as well.

According to JoEva Jones, a volunteer at Helping Hands, SERRV and Self-Help are "a way for groups of people to get established — they are a stepping stone. Hopefully the people are getting a fair price for their wares. Of course, it's according to their living standards and not ours."

Some crafts are from one family, while others may come from a village or community. One group of men, who make glass spun birds and stars, pledged that they will make improvements in the housing and water systems in their village with the pro-

fits they make from their products.

"There is definitely quality control, as they realize their products are being sold in other parts of the world, and they are open to suggestions for better packaging, better gluing, etc.," commented Jones.

Currently the hours of Helping Hands are Thursdays 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., and Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Thus far, Helping Hands has sold over \$12,000 worth of items, which has helped a number of individuals from around the world who depend upon the sale of their

handcrafts as the major source of income for their families.

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