

Sharing the Dream: Fair trade, indigenous cultures

By Norma C. Wilson

(Part one of a five-part series)

In January I explored the Guatemalan highlands with my husband and STDG Board member Jerry Wilson, filmmaker Charles Nauman, weaver Grete Bodogaard, environmentalist Dana Loseke and information technologist Ronda Harrity.

Traveling with interpreter Miguel Nesselhuf we visited seven artisan groups whose work is marketed by Sharing the Dream, a rural school built with STDG help, the Elder Center and elders' homes, students assisted with STDG scholarships, numerous villages tucked amongst the volcanoes surrounding Lake Atitlán, the central plaza of Guatemala City, the ancient capital of Antigua and more.

The creative arts of America's indigenous people are nowhere more visible than in beautiful Guatemala, and the need for Fair Trade opportunities is nowhere more obvious. We met Mayan artisans face to face, watched them work and bought their products. Despite an economy broken by centuries of colonization, corruption, natural disasters, violence, poverty and lawlessness, we found hope among the artisans, teachers and others working to achieve



Clemencia of Corazon de Mujer and her daughter Guadalupe thread a warp.

sustainability for those who are most in need.

We were impressed with the conscientious energy – not to mention the great cooking – of STDG's indigenous Guatemalan staff – Director Diana Ramirez, Elder Center Director Bernavela Sapalú, former STDG scholarship recipient and now Artisan Development Director Isabel Quisquina and others.

Isabel's story was especially moving. After

her father's death, Isabel's family faced wrenching poverty. But with help from STDG Isabel was able to go to get an education. After high school, she assisted the former artisan development director, and now directs the program, working with groups in remote villages, communicating with them in the indigenous language, and helping them design and produce new products in order for them to achieve sustainability.

On our first day we met with Justina, Clemencia and Dora, three Kachiquel women from one of the weaving cooperatives with which Isabel works, Corazon de Mujer (Heart of Women).

The group was founded in 1980 by Justina and other women who fled army attacks in their village to the city of Chimaltenango. Sisters Clemencia and Dora arrived a decade later after their mother died. There was no one to take care for them, and they were starving.

Justina learned from her mother to sew when she was seven, and then to weave.

"When you want to get married you have to know how to make your corté, belt and huipil; and if you don't know how no one will want you," she explained. "All the men know is working in the fields. The women have to learn to weave to make our clothes because the men can't afford to

buy them."

Justina said the army thought some of her fellow villagers were guerilla fighters, so women who left the village to market their products avoided wearing their distinct weaving pattern for fear the soldiers would target them.

By marketing weavings through Corazon de Mujer, Justina was able to support and educate her children and improve her home.

Dora was the eldest of five starving sisters who arrived in Chimaltenango in 1991. Clemencia said that Dora worked long days for the bread she would bring home for her siblings late each night. Dora

wouldn't eat until everyone else had been fed.

Though she desired schooling, she worked and waited until her younger sisters finished school. By then, Dora tearfully told us, she was so much older than other students it was hard to feel accepted, but Justina and another older female student encouraged her to continue.

Three years ago, at age 37, she graduated from high school. Dora said she is happy now, because she understands that, "God's work is in the form of people helping one another."

After the weavers demonstrated their skills, they offered us a chance at the loom. Grete, who seldom works with a back strap loom, but had learned the skill in her native Norway, was up to the task, impressing us with her work.

Like most indigenous women, the women of Corazon de Mujer wear traditional Mayan clothing, but they have adopted some modern technologies, such as cell phones. They said that sweethearts in their community stay in touch by texting.

Hearing that they are always looking for new items to market, Dana suggested cell phone cases. Ronda loaned hers to Isabel, who drew a template for the weavers.

Clemencia's two-year-old daughter Guadalupe gave us each a hug and kiss before they left for home.

(Courtesy photo)

February Clearance
20% - 50% off Regular Price of EVERY PAIR
 Aetrex - SAS - Minnetonka - Red Wing - Justin - Wolverine
Boston Shoes to Boots
 312 W. 3rd • Yankton • 665-9092

Classifieds work!
Call
624-4429

Annual Meeting Township of Garfield
 will be held
Tuesday, March 5, 2013, 1:30 p.m.
 at the Dalesburg Lutheran Church for the purpose of electing one supervisor, treasurer and one clerk and for any other business that comes before the board.
Jim Danielson, Clerk

Notice of Annal Meeting of Brule Township
 Brule Township in Union County, SD will hold the annual township meeting Tuesday, March 5, 2013 at 5:30pm in the Union Shop, Spink, SD for the election of officers and any other business proper to be done when convened.
Gregg Hanson, Clerk

NOTICE
 The annual meeting of Norway Township will be on Tuesday, March 5, 2013 at 1:00 p.m. at the Clay County Highway Department on Timber Rd. Bids for blading, gravel, snow removal and mowing will be opened at that time. Send bids to: Jay Bottolfson, Clerk, Norway Township, 45723 Timber Rd., Vermillion, SD 57069. No later than Friday, March 1, 2013. Township reserves right to reject any and all bids.
Jay Bottolfson, Clerk

HeartPrint Home Care
Serving Southeast South Dakota since 2005
Allowing people to remain independent with in-home personal and companion care services.
 •Activities of Daily Living •Transportation
 •Medication Reminders •Meal Assistance
 •Light Housekeeping & Much, Much More!
 Vermillion 605-624-5900 | Yankton 605-655-5900
 Toll Free 877-624-5900
 www.HeartPrintHomeCare.com

BIG IRON
ONLINE AUCTIONS
 Experience the **POWER** of BigIron.com
ONLINE ONLY UNRESERVED AUCTION
 www.bigiron.com
Wednesday, February 27, 2013
 First Lots Scheduled to Close at 10:00 AM Central Time
 NO BUYERS PREMIUM FEE & NO RESERVES!!
478 LOTS SELLING ON THIS AUCTION!
 15 Tractors, 4 Wheel Loaders, 6 Semi Trucks, 8 Straight Trucks, Trailers, 3 Combines, 13 Planters, Bulk Seed Equipment, 2 Drills, Feed, 5 Grain Carts, 5 Mower/Conditioners, 4 Rakes, 3 Stalk Choppers, 6 Balers, Backhoe, 6 Cultivators, 7 Disks, Fertilizer/Chemical Equipment, Livestock Equipment, and much more!
The next BigIron.com auction is on March 6!
 Do you have equipment to sell?
 Call 1-800-937-3558 for your local rep.
 BigIron.com is a division of Stock Auction Company

IMMEDIATE OPENINGS
OAKWOOD APARTMENTS
 •AFFORDABLE RENT
 ADJUSTMENT FOR YOUR INCOME
 •LARGE 2 AND 3 BEDROOM RENTAL UNITS
 •STOVE, REFRIGERATOR & AIR CONDITIONING
 •OFF-STREET PARKING AND PLUG-INS
 •UTILITIES INCLUDED
 •ON-SITE COIN LAUNDRY
 •PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT & SAND BOX
 •3 BLOCKS FROM CAMPUS
CALL NIKKI OR DAVE
(605) 624-9557