

Gift shop answers to higher calling

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Talking Shop with **Melody Hull**, owner of **He She and Me**. Open since March, He She and Me has grown from a denim studio to a Christian clothing and gift shop with a higher purpose: 50 percent of profits are donated to missionary work.

The store recently partnered with Ten Thousand Villages to carry fair trade items made by artisans in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. Fair trade gives the artisans a fair wage and gives them a means to support themselves.

The store is tucked away in the back of Royal Gulf Plaza at 2701 Cleveland Ave., across from Lee Memorial Hospital in Fort Myers. Call (941) 769-6905. Shop hours are Monday through Friday from 2 to 6 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

What items are flying off the shelf?

We have a carved box in the shape of a fish that opens to a mancala game inside. Also, jeweled utensils from Tanzania and bean pots and beautiful dishes from Bulgaria.

What is the best buy in your store this week?

I just got some jade jewelry from Myanmar in brown, white and green jade. The necklaces are \$20-26 and earrings are \$10.

Who is your typical customer?

Primarily women, from 18 year-olds who are passionate about making a difference as, well as 70-year old women who want something other than what you typically find in a gift shop.

What is unique about your store?

We wanted to offer clothing with the message of faith, hope and love. The products themselves are not something you'll find elsewhere. They are handmade and they are unique in that the person who made it is getting paid a fair price. The artisans are being recognized for what they do. Everything in the store is handcrafted and 96 percent is handcrafted in another country.

Besides your store, what other stores do you like to shop in?

I'm trying to shop where it makes a difference, so I shop at consignment stores.

What are you doing to survive the downturn in the economy?

The great thing when you're a new kid on the block is that I'm having the time of my life because I don't know any better. I'm having a great time.

What is the No.1 thing you have learned about business?

Not to discount the power of supportive people and prayer. When I have failed or haven't asked for help, people have held me up.

How has technology changed the way you do business?

Tracking and accounting is much easier using a computer. I also have an Etsy account (at www.etsy.com) to sell missionary items like Faberge eggs from Russia.

What new business would you open tomorrow if you could?

I would incorporate a coffee shop using fairly traded teas and chocolates. I would decorate the shop with Ten Thousand Villages items.

-If you would like to see a local business profiled here, contact the Artful Shopper at 335-0395 or email theartfulshopper@yahoo.com.