

Be the change  Local company raising money to educate needy children
By Jennifer Ormston News Nov 28, 2007



Sean Zister finds a lot of truth in the old proverb "Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach him how to fish and he will eat for a lifetime."

That's why he's started raising funds for a charity that builds schools in areas where poverty and child labour are rampant.

"It is so possible to eliminate poverty around the world by this simple concept of education and alternative income," said the Waterloo resident.

He and his wife, Amy, are donating 100 per cent of the profits from special T-shirts sold at their Kitchener store, Seven Shores Trading Co., to a Canadian organization called Free the Children.

"It's not a quick-fix program," she said. "They're going to go in and help the village in the long run and that's what we've always wanted to be involved with because we have seen poverty first-hand and this is a way we can make a difference."

They hope to sell about 1,600 T-shirts and raise \$20,000 for the cause.

Of that total, half would go to an education program, which provides schools, teachers and resources to give children a basic primary education. More than 40,000 kids attend one of these schools each day, Sean said.

The remaining \$10,000 would be split between an alternative income program that helps parents find sustainable income, thus freeing their children up to attend school, and to a health-care, water and sanitation program.

Every time a customer purchases a \$25 T-shirt, they get to draw a brick on a chart Sean designed.

"It's kind of like a symbolic gesture," he said. "It will be neat because when there's 1,600 of these bricks, it will be an interesting mosaic of people's creations."

So far, 28 shirts, which come in a variety of colours, styles and sizes, have been sold at the store, at 72 St. Leger St., Unit 1, facing Breithaupt Street. They can also be purchased online at the website www.sevenshorestading.com.

Donations can be made in the store or on the Free the Children website, at www.freethechildren.com/getinvolved/donate/index.html. Type "Seven Shores" in the individual's name spot to contribute to the store's fundraising campaign.

Me To We, a sweatshop-free Canadian company that uses eco-fabrics, makes the T-shirts.

And that's important for Sean. "You see all around the world that a lot of textiles are made in sweatshop conditions," he said.

The couple learned first-hand about these conditions when they taught at schools in developing countries.

That's how they came across many handmade products crafted by artisans.

"We saw that the very small purchases we were making from these artisans were making a difference. They were extremely grateful for the purchase," he recalled.

So when they returned to Canada a few years ago, they decided to start a company that helps to alleviate poverty by selling their products at a fair price.

"We thought this is the perfect place to have our store and spread the word about fair trade and the third-world artisans," he said.

Seven Shores sells home décor, art and fashion from countries such as India, Indonesia, Iran and Brazil.

As well, they help out local artisans by selling some of their hand-crafted products.

The Zisters' desire to assist struggling artists stems from the fact they know what it's like to start out.

And Sean doesn't think the expression "the rich get richer while the poor get poorer" has to be a reality.

"Everyone says 'I can't make a difference,' but you know what, yes you can. There are little ways," he said, adding buying a T-shirt is one of them.

Amy, meanwhile, encourages others to get involved with the campaign, and is willing to help them do so.

"To change this, we need to come together as a community or a group. Obviously change is more powerful with a group of people," she said.