

Work of Our Hands Managers Meet Guatemalan Artisans



Joan Klyn (left, with 2 weavers) and Carol Wiehe (below, weaving), Shift Managers at The Work of Our Hands in Pella, Iowa, recently returned from a 10-day trip to meet artisans in Guatemala. The learning tour, hosted by Mayan Hands, gives the unique opportunity to visit artisans in their homes and workshops and to hear first-hand how fair prices and consistent orders from Mayan Hands have improved the lives of artisans around the world. Klyn and Wiehe's trip included visits to homes of back-strap loom weavers, workers in ikat dyeing, embroidery, crochet, and basket-making, as well as recycled glass workshops located throughout the country.

“Through Mayan Hands, we traveled out to the little villages, into people's homes, where they opened both their doors and their hearts to us” said Klyn, shift manager at The Work of Our Hands in Pella, Iowa. “Each woman introduced herself and told us her story. Some stories were tragic-- whole families wiped out in the violence of the civil war. Some stories were uplifting-- children getting educations and careers. The common thread to all the stories was Mayan Hands. Each woman told us how Mayan Hands had changed her life by giving her work and training, and enabling her to pull herself and her family out of the cycle of dire poverty. ” Shoppers at *The Work of Our Hands* experience the world through the hundreds of unique international handicrafts available in stores and online. “Talking with our customers and sharing the stories of artisans who I have personally met is a powerful experience. It gives meaning to my work at The Work of Our Hands. Each product we sell is made by a person who is important to us,” says Weihe.

The Work of Our Hands sells unique home décor and gift items from more than 35 different countries at their local gift store, including items purchased from Mayan Hands. Mayan Hands was founded in 1989, and currently works with about 200 women in nine Guatemalan communities. All over the world, Mayan weavers are recognized as talented textile artists, but most of them live in conditions of extreme poverty. Mayan Hands' mission is to assist these women in their quest to rise from poverty. Working with fair trade, the women can count on a modest and regular income. With an income, they feed their families better, send their children to school, improve their homes and even save a little. Selling their hand-woven textiles at a fair price, the women are gaining control over their lives.



The Work of Our Hands in Pella, Iowa is open 9-5 Monday through Saturday, and until 8 p.m. on Thursday evenings. Both Klyn and Wiehe are available to share experiences about their trip. To request a presentation at your school or community group, please contact either at 628-8687 or Klyn at 628-1339 and Weihe at 628-3249, or visit our website at www.workofourhands.org.

Information courtesy Work of Our Hands 051011

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