

My Fair City

Local retailers are improving the lives of overseas producers, one cup of tea, one piece of jewelry and one cookie at a time.

BY LEAH DOBKIN



MANY PEOPLE DON'T KNOW THAT MILWAUKEE IS THE FIRST FAIR TRADE CITY IN THE US. But what does this mean exactly? In short, that the city has officially resolved to advocate fair wages, safe working conditions, and long-term economic and environmental sustainability related to the production of goods (particularly exports from developing countries) in an effort to empower the lives of the producers.

"If we base our economic system on fair trade, we can stop off-shoring manufacturing jobs and... raise the standard of living for workers in other countries," says Sachin Chheda, director of the Wisconsin Fair Trade Coalition.

Being a fair trade city also means selling the products locally-and Milwaukee delivers. And with the demand for ethically sourced goods on the rise, the fair trade industry continues to grow. In fact, Barb Senn, manager of the Four Corners of the World (www.fairtrademilwaukee.org), says sales have increased by 15% over the last year despite the recession. "Running a fair trade store is a struggle and gamble, but we have a special niche and a better shot than most small businesses because we have both local and global products," she says.

Although coffee, tea and chocolate are top sellers, Senn loves the eco-friendly jewelry that looks like ivory, but is actually made from the tropical Tagua nut grown in Ecuador. But is there a higher price to pay for such products? Senn says no: "We cut out the middleman and our mark-up is not high. You are getting real quality at very reasonable prices."

At nearby Highlands Café (414-727-1799), get some Rishi Tea, distributed by a local company that is one of the largest organic and fair trade tea suppliers in the US. And at Amaranth Bakery

(414-934-0587), sample scones or cookies made with fair trade sugar from Paraguay. Your treats will taste that much sweeter, knowing that you're helping someone live a better life.

SAVE THE DATE On May 9, Milwaukee will celebrate World Fair Trade Day with its second Fair Trade Crawl. Visit any fair trade shop to receive a special passport. If you visit at least eight stores (and get a stamp at each one), you'll receive a prize. www.milwfairtrade.org

GUILT-FREE SHOPPING

The best places to spend your money-and feel good about.

FUTURE GREEN

(Bay View)

www.futuregreen.net

Shop for bath products; baby toys; and goods like place mats made from downed exotic trees and recycled glass.

APPLE A DAY MASSAGE INC.

(Bay View)

www.appleadaymassage.com

Pick up organic skincare products from Ecco-bella and jewelry from Zorbitz after your massage.

SWEENEY TODD FAIR TRADE WORLD BAZAAR

(Bay View)

www.sweeneytoddworld.bazaar.com

Located within a salon, this shop sells art, jewelry, pottery, tapestries and handbags.

FAIR TRADE FOR ALL

(Washington Heights)

www.fairtradeforall.net Browse wood carvings from Bali; wall hangings from India; masks from Kenya; and rugs from Peru.