

## Rising International Gives Real Hope



**Women of La Gonave, an impoverished island northwest of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, show their colorful silk scarves. With the help of Rising International, the women are able to sell their creations to earn money for food and medical supplies.**

In 2001, Felton resident Carmel Jud became aware of the Taliban movement and its effect on women in Afghanistan. She was horrorstruck.

"That a group could take over an entire country and ban women from society was shocking," she recalls. "Any woman who was working had to quit their job, all girls were banned from school, women couldn't leave their homes unless they were accompanied by a man, and they had to wear a burka."

Jud, who had been working in "poverty alleviation" for five years, looked for a way to help. She discovered a nonprofit that Jay Leno's wife had set up to sell crafts made by Afghan women in refugee camps. Jud ordered a pillow.

"The pillow became to me like a messenger," she says. "I couldn't get to [the woman who made it] and she couldn't get to me, but through the pillow we had a link. I started thinking about how can you create beauty in the middle of horrible circumstances."

Within a year, Jud had enlisted the help of Peace Corps groups to export crafts from women in extremely difficult circumstances in third world countries. "We would e-mail [the Peace Corps] and say if the women there are making anything, we will buy it all." After paying the

women upfront for their crafts—jewelry, scarves, pillows, baskets—Jud started giving home parties in her living room to sell the items. The parties soon spread to other people's homes. Jud trained low-income women and teenagers to run the events, giving them a portion of the proceeds of the sales of the crafts.

"Two teens from Salinas are using the money they earned from the parties to go to medical school," Jud says.

Now the group is named Rising International and is fiscally sponsored by the ACTION Council of Monterey. This September, Rising

International held its first gala event, hosted by Clint and Dina Eastwood at their Tehama club.

"I think it's fantastic, creative, innovative, and it seems to be something that piques people's interests," Dina Eastwood says. "The focus that's going on with international catastrophes—like Darfur, African AIDS crises, and Afghanistan's recovery with the Taliban—seems to be hitting home with a lot of people. It's a way to help women who are pushed down. But what she does also is educate people who throw the parties...It helps a lot of different people."

Jud points out that women selling their crafts can go from eating one meal of millet a day to three meals a day for them and their family.

"Our goal is to end poverty in this lifetime," she says. "Poverty experts have shown one way you can do that is if you can empower the mothers. If the mothers have an income, their children will go to school...and that next generation will be transformed."

For more information about Rising International, call 831/335-2686 or go to [www.risinginternational.org](http://www.risinginternational.org).

—Brett Wilbur