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BULLETS INTO BRACELETS

JEWELRY SALES PARTIES HELP WORLD'S POOR WOMEN

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Before September's terror attacks, Carmel Jud was not the sort to bore into international politics.

She was running her own successful radio advertising company, Carmel Jud Creative, up in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Sure, she'd heard of the Taliban. She knew it was evil, particularly in its treatment of women. But, she shut out most of the chatter.

Then came the Sept. 11 attacks. And Jud hunted for that old e-mail her fiance had sent. The one about the Taliban and its brutal treatment of women.

"I remember thinking if anything positive is to come of this," she says, "perhaps these women's cries will be heard."

It's fair to say that many in the United States took a crash course in the Taliban and its treatment of women last fall. The learning was good, Jud figured, but it wasn't enough. She wanted to do something.

She read up on the plight of poor women in developing countries. She determined that it was the women of poor countries who held the future. As caregivers, they were most responsible for the survival and education of the coming generation.

"If you're going to change the world," she says, "you've got to empower women."

On the Web, she found examples of jewelry and art made by poor women in India and Nepal and by Afghan refugees in Pakistan.

She had a brainstorm: Why not create a pipeline for this jewelry and art that would ensure the women decent pay? Why not host small gatherings at people's homes, where others could see and touch the jewelry and, of course, buy it?

It was a way to connect -- a pursuit that is as important to Silicon Valley as the spirit of invention and the ethos of entrepreneurship.

While Jud hopes to do good, she hopes the plan will be profitable, too. That way the house party concept is more likely to spread, she says. Though prices and currency values fluctuate, Jud's wholesaler might pay an artisan \$12 for a handmade decorative pillow. Jud then buys the pillow for \$35. She then marks it up 2 to 2 1/2 times for resale, a big number, but hardly unheard of in retail.

"I think the only way that I'm going to have success at this and create a demand for fair trade is if people make money from it," Jud says. And the bottom line, she says, is that a woman in India receives a steady income sufficient to house and feed her family.

We sit at a global crossroads. People move here from around the world. Businesses seek

global partners.

Carmel Jud's new enterprise, Rising International, seems small by comparison, but didn't your mother or someone important to you once explain that little things mean a lot? Since early May, Jud has been organizing small parties. Think Tupperware or Avon party with a social message.

Jud works through wholesalers who abide by Fair Trade Federation guidelines calling for a living wage for artisans in developing countries. She gathers biographies of the women who do the work and shares them with partygoers. She sometimes shows a brief documentary about women under the Taliban.

"Mostly, we'd all be crying," says Jud, 37. "I'd cry every time I saw it."

Jud, with fiance Brian Todd, has spent the past 17 years producing advertising jingles and running focus groups. Rising International has opened her eyes. Now she hopes to channel some of the venture's profits into a charity to help women in developing countries. Her suppliers live in a world where children are sold into slavery, where refugee artists disappear for months on end, where art and jewelry are made from found items.

"A lot of these are recycled gun shells," Jud says, sweeping her hand over a table of necklaces and bracelets. "They're determined to have beauty in their lives."

Jud hopes the house parties will spread and that others will begin hosting them.

"So, there's 3 million women selling Avon," she says. "What if 3 million women were supporting the poorest women in the world?"

For now, it's a start. A connection between those who have and those who need so much more.

Caption:

PHOTO: RICHARD KOCI HERNANDEZ -- MERCURY NEWS

Carmel Jud, reflected in a mirror, arranges bracelets from Afghanistan during a party in Mill Valley. Jud organizes Avon-like parties where she sells jewelry made by some of the poorest women in the world.

PHOTO: RICHARD KOCI HERNANDEZ -- MERCURY NEWS

Gwendolyn Anderson of Novato, left, and Susan Kirsch of Mill Valley spin prayer wheels from Nepal during a party. Photos (2)

Memo:

Silicon Valley Dispatches

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