

Carroll County Times

Nonprofit group SERRV continues mission of fighting poverty worldwide

By Adam Bednar, Times Staff Writer

NEW WINDSOR — At the back of SERRV's gift shop hangs a bright orange sign with the organization's mission statement: "Eradicate poverty wherever it resides."

On Friday, the organization, which has been in Carroll County since its inception, will celebrate its 60th year of trying to achieve that goal.

The group will host events all day including meals and concerts. Some are open to the public and others are by invitation only.

SERRV is a nonprofit fair trade organization that works with artisans in 35 developing nations. Fair trade is a market-based approach to promoting equal trade with producers of goods, especially those in developing countries.

The organization helps the artisans sell their products, primarily in the United States, through the organization's catalog and Web site.

SERRV will send out 1 million catalogs between their spring and fall issues this year, said Kathy Harley, the group's customer service director and operations coordinator.

The group's origins can be traced back to missionaries that brought back cuckoo clocks from post-World War II Europe to sell and help people on the war torn continent earn a living, Harley said.

Now the group sells everything from food in its catalogue to furniture and musical instruments at their shop in New Windsor at the Brethren Service Center's campus.

The group initially was associated with the Church of the Brethren but became an independent group with its own board of directors in 1999.

Most of the products sold by SERRV are made from recyclables or raw materials in the countries where the artists live.

"It's amazing what these artisans can do with the things just in their area," Harley said.

Gisele Fleurant, executive director of a group that helps Haitian artists, was at the gift shop on Wednesday.

She came to help the group celebrate its anniversary because of the support their artisans have received from SERRV.

"SERRV has been a great supporter of Haitian [art] producers," Fleurant said while admiring the jewelry in the shop.

SERRV has a small staff that gets help from a large contingent of volunteers. Harley said that as many as 5,000 people will volunteer with the organization this year.

Some people will volunteer for one day others will volunteer for three or four months, Harley said.

The organization also provides jobs for people with developmental disabilities through The Arc of Carroll County.

Several people that receive aid from The Arc packed bowls from India made from recycled bracelets on Wednesday.

"They love their jobs," said Shelly Garber, a job coach at The Arc.

Reach staff writer Adam Bednar at 410-751-5908 or adam.bednar@carrollcountytimes.com.

IF YOU GO

What: SERRV gift shop

When: 9:30a.m.-5p.m. Monday through Saturday

Where: 500 Main St., New Windsor

Information: 410-635-8711



DYLAN SLAGLE/STAFF PHOTO
Gisele Fleurant, of Petionville, Haiti, left, talks about jewelry pieces with store manager Carmen Rubio-Cooke while looking around the SERRV store at the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor Wednesday. Fleurant represents an artisans group in Port Au Prince, Haiti.