

## News

Home > Local News

Text Size + | Text Size -



### Fair trade for fine products

Originally published April 12, 2009

By Kristina Negas  
News-Post Staff

NEW WINDSOR -- A colorful vase made of recycled magazines from Vietnam or a hand-woven basket from India are just a couple of the items found at SERRV International.

And every purchase makes a difference.

Founded 60 years ago by the Church of the Brethren, SERRV is a nonprofit organization that aims to eradicate poverty through fair trade. It became an independent nonprofit in 1999.

SERRV, which is a word on its own and was formerly known as A Greater Gift, buys and sells handicrafts from 35 Third World countries, paying artisans and farmers fair value for their goods.

"We ask them, 'What is a fair price?'" said Pete Twentey, director of material handling at SERRV's New Windsor campus.

SERRV pays artisans 50 percent of the value of their items upfront to cover the cost of materials, then makes the additional payment when products are ready to ship, Twentey said.

Paying fair wages helps create opportunities for artisans and farmers to work their way out of poverty and provide for their families, said Mary Ann Grossnickle, volunteer coordinator.

Items include hand-painted carved wooden boxes, children's toys, coffee mugs and beaded jewelry.

"Everything we have is handcrafted," Twentey said.

Often, SERRV provides artisans with tools and training to make crafts more marketable, Grossnickle said.

"They can tweak it so it will sell a little bit better."

SERRV also sells chocolate and coffee, with ingredients grown all over the world. For example, cocoa beans for the Divine Chocolate brand are grown in Ghana, then shipped to Germany to make the gourmet-quality chocolate.

SERRV has stores in New Windsor and in Madison, Wis. Local shops, such as Dancing Bear Toys in downtown Frederick, can also buy products in bulk from SERRV to sell. Sometimes churches buy items from SERRV to sell at bazaars, Grossnickle said.

Because SERRV is a nonprofit, it relies on volunteers to pack, unpack, inspect and price items.

"If it wasn't for the volunteers, we wouldn't exist," Twentey said.

Several Frederick County churches and schools have taken time to volunteer at SERRV, including a confirmation class from [Middletown](#) United Methodist Church, who spent Wednesday at the New Windsor store.

"It's just wonderful," said Peggy Bishop, a youth volunteer who brought the church group to SERRV to earn community service hours. "The people are very welcoming."

Leon and Joanne LePorte of Columbia began volunteering at SERRV in June 2008 after they saw

NEW! Click photo to view additional photos



Photo by Skip Lawrence

The SERRV store in New Windsor has fair trade items from around the world.

• [Purchase this photo](#)

**NEW**

## 2009 KIAs

under \$ **9,995**

**41**  
mpg



2009 Kia Rio  
CD w/ Sirius Radio

**KIA KIA MOTORS**  
The Power to Surprise!  
10 yr/100k Mile Warranty

**CLICK HERE!**

**Bill Baisey KIA • Frederick, MD**

#### IF YOU GO

- WHAT: Overstock Sale at SERRV
- WHEN: Friday through April 23
- WHERE: 500 Main St., New Windsor
- HOURS: 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday
- INFORMATION: Call 410-635-8711, visit [www.serrv.org](http://www.serrv.org) or e-mail [info@serrv.org](mailto:info@serrv.org)

a blurb about the organization in their church bulletin.

"The people are wonderful and really seriously believe in what they're doing," Joanne LePorte said.

A testament to the organization's dedication to promoting fair trade, SERRV received the inaugural award for Outstanding Service to the Fair Trade Community from the Fair Trade Federation.

Grossnickle encourages shoppers to come to SERRV's New Windsor store from Friday through April 23 for an overstock sale. There will be a discount of 60 percent or more on all items.

---