

# Saint John Festival Sale Benefits Ten Thousand Villages

by Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

If you're in the market for some unique gifts this holiday season, while also doing some good, then you'll want to take in the eighth annual Ten Thousand Villages Festival sale coming up Nov. 13 and 14 at St. Mark's United Church in Greendale on Saint John's West side.

Carolyn Danells and Michelle Ruigrok are two of the scores of volunteers who give their time so that the creators of the unique items for sale can receive 100% of the benefits. Mainly women, they are artisans from 30 developing countries around the world. Carolyn and Michelle first began volunteering when there was a retail outlet on Prince William Street but now they concentrate on the annual sale and coordinating the arrival, display, sales and volunteers involved in the two day event.

The gymnasium of St Mark's will overflow with modern and traditional international crafts like baskets, jewellery, wooden boxes, free trade coffees, jams, spices, ceramics, onyx and Christmas creations such as one-of-a-kind Nativity scenes. More than one hundred volunteers work in shifts ensuring shoppers can select the handmade wares in comfort. They call themselves "Self-Help Saint John Alumni".

All proceeds from the Saint John Festival Sale benefit Ten Thousand Villages artisan partners, who often work at home, sometimes alone and in remote locations around the globe. In addition to over 100 Festival Sales held last year in communities from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island, Ten Thousand Villages also operates 50 stores across Canada, one located at 116 Princess Street in Saint John. Ten Thousand Villages is a non-profit, fair trade organization and a program of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). MCC is the relief, service and peace agency of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches.

The event, which is in its 8th year, provides an opportunity for people to invest in the world from right here in our community. Ten Thousand Villages provides vital, fair income to budding entrepreneurs by marketing their handicrafts and telling their stories in North America. They are paid for their creations in advance of the sales. The more that are sold, the more orders they will receive in future. Purchasers are supporting skilled artisans in Africa, Asia and Latin America, who receive a fair price for their work. Products sold by Ten Thousand Villages do not come from large factories but are made in small group settings or in homes where artisans can also manage household responsibilities or farm work.

Each year, Self-Help Saint John Alumni partners with Ten Thousand Villages, the oldest and largest fair trade retailer in North America. A non-profit organization, Ten Thousand Villages approaches business in a different way: they create an international marketplace where the well-being of artisans in developing countries is just as important as that of their North American customers. Ten Thousand Villages enables them to provide for their basic needs, as well as plan for their future. For every \$3500 in sales, an artisan family in an impoverished country, can survive and have a good quality of living for an entire year.

"I love knowing that the volunteer work that we're doing is helping so many people maintain a decent standard of living, while maintaining their pride and dignity" states Michelle Ruigrok. "The sale is possible because of the many volunteers who so freely give of their time each year. They do everything from distributing posters, setting up the sale and recycling empty boxes to manning displays and sales during this busy and exciting two day event. Many of our volunteers have been involved since the first year and return each November to lend a helping hand" she adds. Michelle's husband, John and daughter Alexandria, Maridel Green, Cindi Flemming and Cathie Inslie are also key volunteers who gladly work on behalf of world neighbours they will never meet.

After the sale weekend, over 100 thank you notes are sent out to volunteers who, year after year, give of their time to help with the sale to make it all possible.

Sale dates: Friday, November 13, 2009 from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm & Saturday, November 14, 2009 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm  
St. Mark's United Church - 50 Dexter Drive, West Saint John [www.TenThousandVillages.ca](http://www.TenThousandVillages.ca) Michelle Ruigrok, 506-672-0468



PHOTO: Carolyn Danells, left, Alexandria Ruigrok, 12, and her mother, Michelle, hold goods from around the world. They are among the scores of volunteers who give their time to organize and host the annual Ten Thousand Villages Festival Sale, slated for Nov. 13 and 14 at St. Mark's United Church.



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*Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation. Contact the foundation at 506-672-8880. To view other Community Profiles go to [www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca](http://www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca)*