

PJEC Alternative Fair takes profit motive out of Christmas

By Emily Morrison

If the over-commercialization of Christmas is already getting you down and it's only a week after Thanksgiving, consider the alternatives to shopping mall purchases.

You can make your Christmas gifts yourself, if you have the requisite time and talent. Or you can invest in imported goods handcrafted by Third World artisans paid directly for their labor by such non-profit agencies as SERRV or Jubilee Crafts, which attempt to eliminate the exploitation of native workers by obtaining a fair market price for handcrafted items.

Once again this December 6, the Rochester Peace and Justice Education Center (PJEC) will make such crafts available for sale to the public at the 9th annual Alternative Celebration Fair, to be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. this Saturday at the New Life Presbyterian Church, 243 Rosedale St., Rochester.

"The fair is an alternative to shopping in malls, where most things are mass-manufactured, high-priced and often imported with very little compensation for the workers, who often make pennies for their labor," says Liz Litwiller, treasurer of PJEC, a volunteer organization dedicated, as its brochure reads, "to the pursuit of a peaceful and just world through community education and non-violent action."

"The purpose of the fair is to support holiday celebration in harmony with our human and natural environment," wrote Litwiller in a news-release announcing the event. "Selected craftspeople, musicians and others artists are invited to help create a sense of community in a peaceful, non-materialistic, creative way."

In addition to imported craft items, the fair will also offer seasonal cards and stationery from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a national group with similar aims; folk singing by the Golden Link Singers; movies and other activities for children; food grown regionally and prepared by the Politics of Food, a task force of PJEC; and crafts created by local artisans.

Local craftspeople represented at the fair will include potters Ed Roselene and Lyn Lar-

son; an area basket maker; and various area residents who plan to sell knitted and crocheted holiday items. Like their counterparts in developing nations, such artisans often operate their craft businesses as "cottage industries," according to Litwiller, who explains that they produce and market their own work.

Handcrafted articles available from SERRV will include baskets of jute or native grass made in Bangladesh by the Jute Works, a Moslem women's support group that enables widowed, divorced or abandoned women to escape the historic alternatives of begging or starvation. Other imported baskets come from the Philippines, where the exploitation of sweatshop labor is widespread, according to Litwiller.

Carved hardwood impalas, elephants and other animals are ordered by SERRV from Kenya and Thailand. Teak birds from Thailand are produced at the McKean Rehabilitation Institute, where victims of leprosy are encouraged to practice native crafts.

Engraved brass bells and bud vases from India are among a number of brass articles that will be offered for sale. Also available will be bookmarks, jewelry, jewelry boxes, papier mache and woven items, and handmade holiday ornaments and creches.

"There will be six tables of Central and South American crafts," says Litwiller, who cites native textile crafts as popular gift items. PJEC's Rochester Committee on Latin America (ROCLA) task force will stock two of the tables with woven goods and 1987 ROCLA calendars commemorating the group's second annual Latin American Solidarity Arts Festival, held at Pyramid Arts Center during the summer.

PJEC's third task force, DPTF (the Disarmament and Peace Task Force) will sell T-shirts, bumper stickers and buttons, many of which have anti-nuclear messages. DPTF projects include counter-recruitment activities and draft counseling, education about nuclear arms and militarism, support for conscientious objectors, the publication of poetry by Voices for Peace, the work of Rochester Military Tax Resistance, and cooperation with oth-



Jeff Goulding/Courier Journal

Handcrafted gift items from developing countries, along with a selection of calendars and greeting cards, will be offered for sale at the Peace and Justice Education Center's Alternative Celebration Fair.

er area groups dedicated to similar pursuits.

The Politics of Food, which maintains its offices at New Life Presbyterian Church, will host an open house throughout the day. The group plans to sell books, Philippine crafts, vegetable soup made from regionally grown vegetables, locally made bread and organic grape juice, and other foods. Politics for Food administers the Food for People Network, sponsors workshops on nutrition as well as local and global hunger issues, helps monitor infant formula marketing, and collaborates with area food clubs, community gardening groups, and task forces.

The Rochester Peace and Justice Education Center is the local chapter of Clergy and Laity Concerned. Founded in 1965, CALC is an interfaith, multiracial network with chapters

located throughout the United States. As PJEC's literature explains, CALC's objective is "a common concern for those who are denied justice." The local chapter was founded in 1974, and maintains offices at the Genesee Co-op, 713 Monroe Avenue, Rochester.

"The Alternative Fair is offered to the local community as an alternative to the current over-commercialism and over-consumption prevailing in today's celebration of holidays," says Litwiller. For the socially conscious—or anyone who's interested in purchasing unusual handcrafted gifts you don't have to spend hours tracking down in a mobbed department store at the height of the commercial Christmas-season countdown—it's a welcome alternative indeed.



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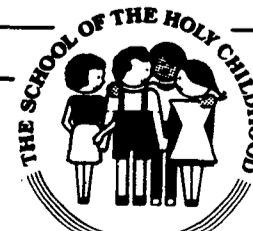
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