

**WINNIPEG, MANITOBA**[WWW.TENTHOUSANDVILLAGES.CA](http://WWW.TENTHOUSANDVILLAGES.CA)

# Ten Thousand Villages

From humble roots to one of North America's largest fair trade organizations! The story of Ten Thousand Villages is one of an international development organization that originated through relationships that grew out of service and outreach work in the Caribbean, but evolved into market-based support for artisans around the world looking to provide for themselves and their families.

It all began back in 1946 in a small community in Puerto Rico, when a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worker named Edna Ruth Byler visited a sewing class that MCC was offering to women. The participants and volunteer teachers explained that their greatest challenge was selling their products, given the rampant poverty and the resulting small demand for handicrafts in their communities. They suggested that Edna take some of their embroidery home to the United States to sell to friends and family.

Byler could not have dreamed that this first attempt at expanding the market for these women to North America would result in \$42 million in annual sales benefitting 60,000 artisans around the world six decades later. Edna's home sales marked the beginning of a beautiful friendship between customers in North America and artisans in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East that came to be known as Ten Thousand Villages.

Ten Thousand Villages is a non-profit fair trade →



**TEN THOUSAND  
VILLAGES®**

→ organization—a retailer designed to benefit artisans, not to maximize profits. Ten Thousand Villages operates 49 stores across Canada (6 in Manitoba) and purchases products from more than 35 countries in the developing world. Ten Thousand Villages purchases merchandise and creates significant economic opportunities for over 100 artisan groups. The economic impact is also felt here in North America as they employ 109 corporate staff and offer training and volunteer service experience to over two thousand volunteers. While Ten Thousand Villages is financially independent, MCC still acts as their parent organization and often provides information about potential artisans that they meet while doing their development work in poor communities around the world.

Promoting fair trade is one of Ten Thousand Villages most important roles in the international community. In fact, they were a founding member of the World Fair Trade Organization. Fair Trade standards ensure that artisans earn fair value, respect and dignity for their work. A major part of the fair trade concept is not only providing access to markets for these artisans, but paying them a fair price for their product, providing advance payments, and ensuring the continuity of orders. Ten Thousand Villages purchases nearly \$15 million worth of goods directly from artisans each year. This would not likely happen if they sold their wares to the traditional 'market'.

By supporting traditional handicrafts, Ten Thousand Villages also ensures that time-honoured

skills are not lost. And in doing so, Ten Thousand Villages cultivates relationships with people who are unemployed or underemployed, and provides opportunities for individuals whose gender or physical disability might act as a barrier to employment. As a result, 70 percent of the artisans they purchase from are women.

The outlet for Ten Thousand Villages is their retail stores, which combined for nearly \$42 million in sales across North America last year. Total retail sales in Canada alone totaled nearly \$18 million, and sales in Manitoba reached over \$2 million. The Altona store in Manitoba, Canada's smallest yet oldest store, had sales of \$54,428. Ten Thousand Villages has also recently launched an e-commerce strategy as another method by which to increase support and investment toward artisans around the world.

Ten Thousand Villages is a CED initiative that works to bring equity to our global economy by not only ensuring sales for artisans living in poverty around the world, but by ensuring that the "trade" that occurs between consumers in North America and the artisans occurs through values of fairness, equity, and social justice. By purchasing fair trade gifts, consumers can be assured that they are giving twice: once to the recipient of their gift, and once through fair value paid to the artisan.

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