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**ARTISANS AND
SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES**

LOCAL MARKET, GLOBAL COMMUNITY

How the growing success of a folk arts market is changing the world

by Ilana Kalmbach

The day after the fifth annual Santa Fe International Folk Art Market, Judy Espinar sat down with other planners of the event to review how the 2008 market went and start planning for the next year. “It takes a whole year to plan,” she said. “It’s very, very complex. It’s huge.” In 2007, the market drew over 110 artists from 40 different countries across six continents. More than half of these artists were at the market for the first time.

Enticing all of them to come was never the most difficult part of setting the market in motion—finding them and communicating with them was. Partnerships would prove to be key to locating artists that fit the market’s qualifications.

Early support came from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Because the missions of both the market and UNESCO are similar in many ways, enthusiasm for the project at the UN organization was high. A call to UNESCO from one of the folk art market’s initial planning meetings prompted an immediate response: the organization promised to send 11 artists to the event. That support was then leveraged with other craft development projects. “We were able to say ‘This is our project and UNESCO is sending 11 artisans, can you help us?’ It helped us make strategic partnerships, many of which we still have today,” said Espinar.

These partnerships have been enormously successful. In the 2007

market, for example, over half of the artists who attended were sponsored by partnering organizations. Artist’s cooperatives and non-profit organizations sponsored about one-third of the artists while art dealers sponsored another quarter. Additionally, contributions from both private foundations and individual donors allowed the market to fully sponsor 30 artists.

But monetary donations are not the only thing necessary to bring the market to life. Volunteers were involved in nearly every facet of the market, dedicating thousands of hours of work towards planning, overseeing and executing artist coordination, hospitality, marketing, events, office assistance, and market production.

According to Espinar, over 1,050 registered volunteers have signed on since the market’s inception and their impact has been huge. In fact, volunteers worked so hard that the dollar value of their time dedicated to the 2007 market was estimated at more than \$600,000. “The experience of the market is pregnant with possibilities and opportunities,” Espinar commented, “and people want to be a part of that in whatever way they can.”

Many of the market volunteers are Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. Espinar, an RPCV herself, says that the market exemplifies the Peace Corps ethos. “The Peace Corps is an opportunity to connect with the world from a



Aristude Mukashyaka shows off her colorful baskets.



Judith Haden/Santa Fe International Folk Art Market

Thousands of visitors through Museum Hill for the annual Santa Fe International Folk Art Market.

different point of view and experience culture on a one-on-one basis. In my opinion, the Peace Corps created a whole team of better Americans. They understand their role on the planet and value being a citizen of this country. At the market, we try to show people those same things," she said.

They have the opportunity to show a lot of people those things. In 2007, 17,000 people attended the market, representing 41 different states and six different countries. The market also welcomed international dignitaries from Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Uzbekistan and more. "There is an enormous amount of enthusiasm for the market. We know that anybody that attends will say that this event changed their life," said Espinar.

Part of the success of the market is due to its selectivity. "It's important that this is a curated market," Espinar said. "We only take the best and we only include extremely high quality work."

Due in large part to this high quality, artists' sales at the market are significant. The average revenue generated per booth was \$15,000 in 2007. Of the booths for which the market handled sales, 73 percent earned more than \$10,000. That kind of money has a major impact on the lives of the artists and their families, and helps to sustain entire communities.

Raising awareness about this community impact is one the market's main goals. "The market is really about community sustainability, both through the income it generates and the community infrastructure it helps to build. The sustainability of these cultural treasures is incredibly important to us," Espinar said.

An integral part of the market's mission is to find ways to support cultures. Currently, the market is looking for ways to scale up and to promote more folk arts markets around the world. It is not just about getting bigger; it is about

getting more global. Espinar argues that markets like the one in Santa Fe are essential survival mechanism for communities and their cultures. "These traditions are the voices of these cultures. Every time a folk art tradition disappears, we lose an expression of that culture," she said.

It is a theme she believes people attending the market understand. They are doing more just than just buying beautiful pieces of art; they are participating in a meeting ground where people can get to know and understand each other on both cultural and personal levels.

The folk art market, said Espinar, for all of its complex goals and challenging aims, runs with one simple principle constantly in mind: "The more culture we can preserve, the better off we all are."

Ilana Kalmbach is an intern at the NPCA. She attends American University's School of Communication in Washington, DC.