



philanthropy:

MORE THAN A HIGH-QUALITY RETAIL STORE...

STORY BY J. L. BIBB

It just seemed to make sense. For Christina Martin and Marianne DeMeyers, mixing business with benevolence was a no-brainer. When the two began conceiving a new retail shop in downtown Franklin, they knew it had to be more than clothing and accessories. It had to be mission-driven.

"At its heart, Philanthropy is meant to provide a platform for giving," Marianne says. "From the products we choose to the charities we sponsor to the mission jar on the counter, our desire is to create opportunities for people in this area to support worthy causes."

Initially, the women say they wanted to start a great business and have giving back be a part of it. As their business plan developed, their focus shifted. Their desire became to create a business whose chief aim would be to make the world a better place, a business whose vision would be driven by an unwavering commitment to giving back. For both of them, the death of Christina's father played a large role in making this dream a reality.

"You really have to do this,"

Christina recalls her father saying to her last fall. "God created you for a big vision, don't think of this in small terms. God will bless this work."

Four hours later, her father died unexpectedly of a heart attack.

"It was his last message to me," she says. "And it was so profound. It actually propelled Marianne and I forward because we felt such affirmation and sense of purpose from what he had said."

WALKING THE WALK, BACKING THEIR TALK

"Nobody's ever created anything like this," Marianne explains. "There are plans for retail shops, and there are plans for nonprofits, but there is nothing that synergizes the two quite like Philanthropy."

"We want to take this store, learn what works and what doesn't, and then plant a seed for Philanthropy in other communities. We will utilize a franchise model, so that entrepreneurs with charitable hearts can have ownership over the individual stores. But their mission will be the same as ours, and they will all work together."

It may be a big vision, but



Christina and Marianne already have a waiting list of folks around the country who are interested in following their lead. There seems to be something very compelling about the way these two have set up the initial model. In fact, the charities supported by the store are just as important as the products they choose to sell. Philanthropy gives back 10 percent of its profit to various charitable organizations. On top of that, the store is stocked with items from companies that also choose to give back from their profits.

Take the accessories and jewelry company, PILGRIM. It gives a portion of its profits to Doctors without Borders. Or there's the company, Genuine Fake, which gives a portion of its sales to animal shelters. For Philanthropy's owners, it's important that the lines they carry come with a social conscience.

"We really want our store to carry out its mission with each sale," Marianne explains. "That's one reason we have so many diverse products, though our primary focus is women's and men's fashion. At every turn, we want to meet people's shopping needs with high-quality offerings."

Philanthropy is already plugged into the local community, as well. Their emerging artist campaign started this summer and featured a local talent.

"We showcased the work of a local, gifted artist named Joseph Bibb," Christina says. "We chose him for our first show because his pieces were raw and emotion-provoking. We also like that he donates 25 percent of the sale of his art to the Dollars for

Darfur program as carried out by African Leadership, a Franklin-based charitable organization."

In addition, Philanthropy supported its first mission trip this year, sending Christina to Cape Town, South Africa in late September.

"It was a huge eye-opener for me," Christina says. "Missions work is very important to us, and we wanted to actively do something, where we physically went somewhere and helped. I had an opportunity to go with Brentwood Baptist for two weeks and work at a hospice in Cape Town.

"Now I know even more why this store is open! There is such a huge need, just in Cape Town, and that is only one town! But what struck me during my trip was that there was so much beauty and so much devastation sharing the same space. The AIDS population is so huge there, but there was also so much love and so much service among the citizens there. People's lives are so less cluttered there, but their relationships with each other are so deep and pure. They had a joy like I have never seen. After my trip, I just felt so unworthy. In so many ways, I was changed so much more than the people we went there to help."

FOLLOWING THEIR HEARTS, TAKING THE NEXT STEPS

For the owners of Philanthropy, the past year couldn't have been more successful and more meaningful. They say they can't believe how well everything has come together, and they are excited about what the future holds.

"It has been such an incredible year," Marianne says. "This community has been so supportive, our husbands and children have been so encouraging and understanding. And I have formed a powerful friendship

with someone who has changed my life."

Looking forward to 2008, Marianne and Christina have more big plans.

"As we move into next year, we have already begun to plan mission trips to Guatemala and Sudan, and we are so excited about those opportunities,"

Marianne says. "At the store, we will be planning out more details about our franchising opportunities and coming up with ways that other communities will be able to personalize Philanthropy products in their stores.

"And we are working on designing our own line. In fact, we have been to California several times this past year, working with 'indie' clothing designers because we like the casual West Coast feel in our clothing lines. We have artists and designers who are creating lines specifically for Philanthropy - lines that will only be found in our store. Other products and styles will change with the coming seasons, encouraging our customers to come in and see what's new."

But on a day-to-day basis, the women say they want to be sure that everything they do has a purpose.

"I want people to see that we're genuine and that God is reflected through us," Christina explains. "We don't take credit for any of this. It's not the Marianne and Christina show - it's about God and His plan. If we can inspire folks in some small way and encourage positive change, that's what we want."

photo by Anthony Scarlati



MARIANNE DEMEYERS & CHRISTINA MARTIN

WHAT'S HOT AT PHILANTHROPY THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

"Our jewelry lines, such as BB Becker and Santa Bella, go from casual to evening in their style," Marianne says. "Our gift and home accents are carefully selected to add that special touch to your home. Many of our items are Philanthropy branded also. We have Main Street Candles and Leiper's Fork Candles, for example."

Other exciting items you can find during this season include:

- ☞ Dark wash denim for women & men
- ☞ Faux fur jackets, coats and capes
- ☞ Designer jewelry
- ☞ Pre-packaged gifts
- ☞ Stocking stuffers
- ☞ Engraving services
- ☞ Limited edition "Save the Franklin Theatre t-shirts," supporting the purchase and renovation of Franklin's Historic Theatre