

A World of CHANGE

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SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS TAKING HOLD IN CENTRAL FLORIDA, WHERE A NEW INITIATIVE AT ROLLINS COLLEGE IS BRINGING ATTENTION TO THE BUSINESS OF GLOBAL REFORM.



»» Give a man a fish, as the proverb goes, and you feed him for a day. But teach a woman to make and sell handi-crafts, and you feed her family, strengthen her community, and maybe even change the world.

That's what Debbie Farah believes, so she set up training sessions for artisans in underdeveloped countries and found retail outlets for their wares, including a niche on the Home Shopping Network and a storefront on Park Avenue in Winter Park.

Meanwhile, Marc Lajeunesse sees a better future for Colombian farmers in stevia, a sweet-leafed plant that's becoming an increasingly popular, all-natural alternative to sugar.

Farah and Lajeunesse are Central Florida-based social entrepreneurs, or people who use an innovative business approach to solve a social problem, particularly in marginalized or impoverished populations. This movement combines business strategy with a passion to create meaningful change in the world.

On the company balance sheet, social value is what counts, and profit is a sustainable means to get there. The common thread that connects the two local entrepreneurs is Rollins College's Crummer Graduate School of Business, where both initially sought assistance to bring their business plans to fruition.

BAJAJALA

Craftsmen in developing nations have found a friend in social entrepreneur Debbie Farah. She established a business to help drive social change around the world.



SOCIAL WHAT?

Social entrepreneurship “is gaining momentum all over the world,” says Chrissy Garton, program manager at the Center for Advanced Entrepreneurship at the Crummer Graduate School. “It’s a revolution in how people do business and affect social change.”

The term is relatively new, dating to the 1960s and ’70s, and only came into widespread use in the past few decades. The movement, however, has been around for quite some time. Those who study the phenomenon cite examples of early social entrepreneurs, such as Florence Nightingale, founder of the first nursing school; Robert Owen, who started the cooperative movement; and Vinoba Bhave, who established India’s Land Gift Movement.

Social entrepreneurs take what Garton calls “a broader look at the system.” For instance, a nonprofit social service agency might respond to last year’s earthquake in Haiti by providing food or medical relief. Someone with a social entrepreneurial mindset might approach the situation by asking, what was different in Haiti? Why was the quake so devastating there? One answer might be that buildings there are not made well. So the entrepreneur might establish a construction company in order to accomplish several things: build sturdier homes, provide training and jobs for locals, and start an initiative to help Haitians secure financing to buy the houses.

Technically, social entrepreneurial ventures can be either nonprofit or for-profit, however, the latter have a

better chance of long-term survival, according to Garton. Nonprofits, by definition, can’t make a profit. They also have the ongoing challenge of fundraising, and may be forced to put programs on hold if money isn’t there to support them.

Today, social entrepreneurial efforts are being recognized at high levels. Muhammad Yunus, an economist in Bangladesh, was awarded the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for founding Grameen Bank, which provides micro-credit, no-collateral loans to the poor. Closer to home, the Obama White House has set up the Office of Social Innovation and Civic Participation to help promote innovative ways for individuals, nonprofits, private enterprises, and the government to work together on social challenges from the bottom up.

Farah and Lajeunesse’s companies illustrate Rollins’ definition of social entrepreneurship: recognizing a societal

problem and using entrepreneurial principles to create, organize, and manage a venture to make change and advance the public good. Garton says that there’s an increasing interest in the movement, so much so that Crummer has identified a new area of focus that addresses both social entrepreneurship and its sister movement, sustainable enterprise.

As these business models continue attracting attention — and funding — their names are being tossed around more and more, causing some confusion in exactly what constitutes each. Although there is some crossover in the concepts, what sets social entrepreneurship apart is the focus on the bigger picture, both in terms of profit and social change. It’s bigger than giving someone a fish. It’s even bigger than teaching someone to fish.

Bill Drayton, CEO and founder of Ashoka, a leading global thought leader in social entrepreneurship, puts it



Concern with global issues is part of what makes Rollins a top educational institution. Students there can participate in service-learning field trips to numerous countries.

ROLLINS COLLEGE (2)



Social entrepreneur Marc Lajeunesse has transformed Columbia's farming industry, helping locals shift operations to grow stevia, a popular sweetener that's being used increasingly throughout the world as a sugar substitute.

this way: "Social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry."

LOCAL REVOLUTIONARIES

The Orlando area provides a strong base for social entrepreneurs, even if the fruit of their work is on the other side of the globe. Both Farah and Lajeunesse saw needs elsewhere in the world, but developed business plans here to address them.

An entrepreneur for most of his life, Lajeunesse first formulated the idea to get Colombian farmers to grow stevia about six years ago. Most farmers in the Tolima province, where his operation, Grupo Latour, is located, had been forced to grow cocaine or be displaced by drug violence. Lajeunesse, who started with just five acres, early on sold private-label stevia in stores such as Albertson's supermarkets.

Last year, the region experienced the worst floods in 65 years, but the farmers managed to save the crop. The operation now has a greenhouse for its seed program and Lajeunesse hopes to have 250 acres under production by the end of this year. He's also planning to arrange financing for farmers who want to raise chickens.

Rather than producing his own end product, Lajeunesse sends the leaves to China for processing. The resulting product — which he jokingly refers to as "the other white powder from Colombia" — is 300 times as sweet as sugar and is used by major soft drink

makers, pharmaceutical companies, and candy, cereal and protein shake manufacturers in North and South America. In an area where unemployment is 18 percent, Colombian stevia workers are bringing home the equivalent of minimum wage and are now able to buy houses. In all, approximately 250 families are benefiting from Lajeunesse's efforts.

"It's a drop in the bucket," he says humbly, "but it's what I can do."

Farah's path to the fair-trade jewelry and handicraft business began with the nonprofit side of the equation. A former creative director for an advertising agency, Farah was invited to do some photography for a nonprofit group. Inspired by its philanthropic efforts, she began to learn about global concerns, eventually serving on the boards of several nonprofits and traveling as much as possible to Africa, China, and India.

"I started developing a passion for some of these issues," Farah says. She also started to understand something very basic: women's issues, including lack of education, were connected to many of the problems in developing nations. After operating her own nonprofit to train women artisans, she began Bajalia, a for-profit venture to sell the women's wares and "tell the story of women globally," she says.

Today, women in 22 countries create handcrafted jewelry, housewares, and other items. Bajalia's first retail shop is located on Park Avenue in Winter Park, just down the street from Ten Thousand Villages, a national nonprofit enterprise with a similar mission to cultivate long-term, fair trade relationships with artisans in developing nations.

Bajalia buys its products directly from craftsmen, some of whom make 10 times the average wage for their region, says Farah. Putting money into



Debbie Farah's Bajalia Trading Company empowers women in impoverished nations by paying fair wages for their handicrafts, which are sold at her Winter Park store.

BAJALIA


an economy — especially into the hands of women — builds families and gives women a voice in their communities. Purely social ventures just won't work, Lajeunesse maintains. People need a sense of ownership, of partnership and revenue, for an effort to be successful.

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

Recognizing that social entrepreneurship is a growing segment of the business world, Rollins is increasing its related offerings. Over the past year, the college presented a speaker series that brought in leading experts to discuss education, sustainable agriculture, microfinance, and other elements of social entrepreneurship. Rollins also has active partnerships with global social entrepreneurship pioneers, such as Ashoka, which invited a select group of students, faculty, and administrators to join those of other top educational institutions at a recent retreat at Duke University.

The college is currently working toward establishing an official institute that is dedicated to social entrepreneurship and sustainable enterprise, and will serve students as well as the community by providing curricular education supplemented by co-curricular experiences, including conferences, speakers' series, seminars, internships, community outreach, networking, and research.

"There are so many students here who want to use their education and business savvy to do something real, to help people," says Garton. "We are actively doing something locally to raise awareness and expertise of social entrepreneurship."

The move toward social entrepreneurship and the solutions it seeks to provide boil down to this: significant change in this world requires money. Social entrepreneurship begins where social programs and charitable efforts often fall short, with knowledgeable business leaders recognizing that sustainable profit is key to initiating long-term societal change. 

»» LOCAL LEADERS WITH GLOBAL REACH



PROYECTO TITÍ (2)

While they don't fit the standard definition of social entrepreneurs, there are other initiatives that embrace some of the movement's concepts, bringing positive change to our local community, as well as to other nations.

Long-term conservation success involves science as well as "community programs that involve local people in culturally relevant, action-based programs," says Dr. Anne Savage. A senior conservation biologist at Disney's Orlando-based Animal Kingdom, Savage is the founder of Proyecto Tití, an organization dedicated to protecting endangered cotton-top tamarins, a primate found only in Colombia.

When a colleague and his wife were hanging around the Proyecto Tití office with her one day, the wife started looking for things to crochet. She used an old cassette tape for starters, then Savage spied some plastic bags. What if they were cut into strips? The light bulb went on. If local women could make *mochilas* — a multi-purpose carry-all bag common to Colombia — out of plastic bags, they would have opportunities for employment as well as funding for Proyecto Tití, and what would otherwise be harmful litter would be recycled into something useful.



The enterprise started with about 15 women and now has more than 300. Workers are paid by the piece, and their earnings enable some of them to buy homes for their families. Their handmade "eco-mochilas" are sold in the country, on Proyecto Tití's website, and at Disney's Animal Kingdom.

Disney isn't the only example of a large local company that's making a difference. Approximately 30 percent of Rosen Hotels & Resorts' employees are from Haiti or are of Haitian descent — a fact that owner Harris Rosen takes to heart. Not only does the company offer language development and continuing education programs to its associates, but Rosen also has been spearheading efforts to improve Haiti's quality of life for more than a decade. His Harris Rosen Foundation has provided residents with food, water filtration systems, and educational and medical supplies. Its latest effort, Relief-Rebuild-Sustain, was established in response to the earthquake that devastated the nation last year. A major component of the program is the Little Haiti House project, an effort to provide affordable, sustainable prefab housing to victims of the disaster.