

BUSINESS

Committee Spreads Message About Fair Trade Practices

Group helps township earn the designation of Fair Trade Town

By **Jennifer Pinto** October 12, 2010

Who knew that paying a little extra for flowers could sow seeds of change in the way business is conducted in Teaneck?

For Dennis Klein, a simple chat about the practice of Fair Trade led to the development of the Fair Trade Teaneck Steering Committee. And ultimately, that committee helped Teaneck earn the designation of Fair Trade Town.

"I found out about Fair Trade while shopping one day at Tiger Lily on Cedar Lane," said Klein, who is chair of the committee. "I asked owner Tim Blunk about the topic, and he was very knowledgeable about it. I learned that the Fair Trade movement was about making people more aware about what they buy."

Buying Fair Trade certified products gives some consumers assurances that farmers and producers are following specific standards for how they do business.

"They follow healthy environmental practices, as well as pledge to not use child or slave labor," Klein said.

Making the switch to selling Fair Trade products isn't that difficult, Klein says.

"For some businesses, they're already buying wholesale but aren't aware that same wholesaler can make a switch and provide Fair Trade products," Klein said. "The resistance seems to come with the price. You will pay a little more for Fair Trade items, but the quality is high."

Klein said that when he was first introduced to the Fair Trade concept at Tiger Lily, he ended up paying \$5 more for a bouquet of Fair Trade certified flowers.

"But, it was worth it to me," he said. "We just have to educate the public that the quality of the product is higher, so it's not correct to compare a regular item with something that is Fair Trade."

Common Fair Trade certified products include coffee, tea, fruits, flowers, rice, chocolate, clothing and crafts.

The Fair Trade Teaneck Steering Committee is made up of town residents and a few people from out of town who do business in Teaneck. "We have about 10 to 12 active members, but our email list is very large," said Klein.

The committee officially will announce the town's designation as a Fair Trade Town at the Oct. 21 Teaneck Chamber of Commerce Dinner. The town earned the distinction after getting eight merchants and eight non-profits to commit to selling or providing Fair Trade certified products. The Township Council then had to approve a resolution supporting the title.

"The chamber of commerce was the final organization we needed to pledge its support, so that's why it's fitting to announce the designation at their dinner," Klein said. "October is also Fair Trade Month."

Teaneck is now the 21st municipality in the nation to hold the designation of Fair Trade Town and the fourth in New Jersey, along with Highland Park, [Montclair](http://montclair.patch.com) (<http://montclair.patch.com>) and Red Bank.

When it comes to selling the practice of buying Fair Trade merchandise, Klein said people in the community have been receptive to it.

"We have a good, strong civic commitment in this town," he said. "When the town council approved the resolution, it was very heartening. There are a lot of issues that can divide us, but this concept seems to bring everyone together."

For more information about the Fair Trade Teaneck Steering Committee, visit fairtradeteaneck.org (<http://fairtradeteaneck.org>).

