

Local Business, Global Change: Zumi's Serves Beyond Profit

By Patricia Chan

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He emerges from his office in the back with a huge smile on his face and an apron around his waist. He walks toward the counter, hands pressed together in a respectful greeting held high above his head.

“Umesh! Namaste!” his customer hails from by the door. This is normal. Other customers at tables don't have to look up, but smile into their coffee cups and newspapers.

“Namaste!” Umesh replies in the common Nepalese greeting, and they jump into conversation.

At Zumi's, it's not just a coffee shop, it's an integrated part of the community. And that's just how business owner and entrepreneur from Nepal, Umesh Bhujju, wanted it to be.

Zumi's, a local 100% fair-trade, organic coffee and ice cream shop in Ipswich, does business differently. The shop strives to create a business that is successful while promoting positive social and environmental change at the same time.

“For us, it's not about how we do business, but how we do life,” said Bhujju. “How we make business decisions parallels our vision of living in awareness of our coexistence with all beings, so our commitment to communities both local and global. There is no boundary between business and bringing fullness to life.”

Bhujju's philosophy of business mirrors the journey it has taken him to arrive at Zumi's: motivation. Born in Syangja, a small village in Nepal near the base of Annapurna, Bhujju started his career as a certified mountain guide. His constant contact with foreigners through guiding inspired a trip to Alabama with a student exchange program. Following the exchange program Bhujju continued on to receive a degree from Boston University and a master's degree in business administration from Johnson and Wales University in 2000.

With a background in two cultures, Bhujju explored the business industry with an open mind. Different organizations such as “Green America,” a non-profit organization working with economic strategies to solve social and environmental problems, as well as fair trade resource centers were key in the formation of Bhujju's idea for Zumi's.

“While working through college I became a lover of ‘a really great cup of coffee and espresso done right,’” said Bhujju. “And I appreciated the ‘coffee shop experience,’ that connection between the shop and the customers. I saw what potential that kind of partnership could have. I always knew it was something I would do one day . . . some day . . .”

When that day did come, Bhuju knew it wouldn't be just any old coffee shop. His immediate goal was a commitment to community, both worldwide and right in Ipswich. On a global level, his focus for Zumi's was not about profit, but process.

“Most businesses in general are profit oriented. But here at Zumi's I didn't want profit to be the bottom line. What important is that our business is a fair game; fair to give the farmers and producers purchasing power, fair to pay my staff well, and fair to give the customer a quality product,” said Bhuju.

Bhju personally knows his coffee roaster and trusts his work in the fair trade industry. He knows where each burlap bag of beans comes from, and uses the facility to test new coffee blends. For the shop, products aren't about what sells the fastest and makes the most profit, but about what they are promoting. Bhju admits that he could sell products like soda and make a profit on them. But he doesn't want to promote soda. For Bhju, what's most important is promoting products which benefit the local community, whether it's purchasing food from local vendors, or providing customers with a healthy choice.

As Bhju is a firm believer in free enterprise, believing that owners should have the freedom to choose how their businesses are run. To Bhju, one of the greatest characteristics of America is the freedom of choice and believes businesses have individual decisions to make about what they are promoting. But he does believe that Zumi's can be inspiration to those who are seeking a way to create responsible business practices.

“Because of the things we are doing, people come here and support us . . . and in that way we become a model for other entrepreneurs, showing that it really does work,” said Bhju.

And while Zumi's may not be a nationally recognized name, people are taking notice.

“Being here in Ipswich for six years, I think our message is catching up,” said Bhju. “People know who we are and what we're about. Coming to Zumi's is not just a stop at Dunkin Donuts; our customers and staff are unique. They align with what we're doing and come to support it. And that is how we start a movement.”