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snapshots: portraits of local lives Flagler County woman seeks 'compassionate entrepreneurs'

Flagler woman looking for 'compassionate entrepreneurs'

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The second thing Holly Wehde says to people she meets — after “hello” — is usually “It’s pronounced WADE.”

But having to correct a mispronounced name is barely a blip compared to the hurdles Wehde has had to overcome on her way to co-founding a business that sells products made by women around the world.

After running a business in Massachusetts for 20 years with her husband, Mike, change was in the air.

“My husband came to me and said ‘I believe I am called to the ministry,’” Wehde said.

Apprehensive about being a pastor’s wife, Wehde waited for a sign. She didn’t have long to wait.

“I knew God was calling us to something else, and a month later our business burned to the ground,” she said.

After moving to Palm Coast nine years ago, her husband became lead pastor at Lifecoast Church and Wehde set about to raise the couple’s five children. Then at the age of 40, she suffered a heart attack.

“It was one of those moments in your life when you start asking questions,” she said. “I wondered if I had left the legacy that I want my life to be about.”

Having grown up in a business-oriented family, Wehde began to think about how to combine her entrepreneurial upbringing with her desire to do good.

“I wanted to teach my children that it doesn’t matter if you’re 40, 80 or 13, you can really make a difference in the world,” she said.

After attending a home candle-selling party, Wehde had a flash of inspiration.

“I thought about selling products made by women around the world who need sustainable jobs,” she said.

A walk on the beach with her friend Gretchen Huijskens led to a partnership. Along with her daughter Chelsie Antos, and Huijskens’ daughter Elizabeth, Trades of Hope was born in 2010.



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Holly Wehde, co-founder of Trades of Hope, in the company’s headquarters on State Road 100 in Flagler County.

Working with fair trade groups and the Direct Marketing Association, Wehde and her partners began to put together a business model. Calling on experience gained while traveling on missionary trips with her husband, Wehde found women artisans in countries including Costa Rica and Haiti and the business soon took off.

“We’ve brought jobs to the slums because of these products,” Wehde said.

Each piece sold by Trades of Hope includes a tag telling the story of the woman who made it. The products — such as necklaces, bracelets and other jewelry — are sold at in-home parties by what Wehde calls “compassionate entrepreneurs.”

“That is what our consultants are called,” she said.

Wehde’s company caught the eye of Helga van Eckert, executive director of the Flagler County Department of Economic Opportunity. In fact, van Eckert invited Wehde to talk about Trades of Hope with the county’s Economic Opportunity Advisory Council.

“There are a number of entrepreneurs growing successful businesses in the community,” van Eckert said. “Trades of Hope is a perfect example of one of the hidden jewels. While we are always looking to bring new businesses to the county, it’s equally important that we support and grow existing businesses for the first long term.”

In addition to providing support for Trades of Hope compassionate entrepreneurs, four times a year the company takes consultants on trips to meet the women who make the products they sell.

“We’re giving women a voice they didn’t have,” she said. “We’re giving them skills they didn’t have, so we are giving them opportunities they didn’t have.”

Wehde said the company made more than \$1 million last year, and 10 percent of the profits are turned back to the artisans, in addition to what they receive up front.

Wehde said Trades of Hope also offers women in the United States the chance to earn money.

“I love that it’s helping women in America do amazing things, like send their children to college at the same time it is putting food on the table for women around the world,” she said.

Wehde doesn’t like to focus too much on sales figures, but she realizes that it gives Trades of Hope legitimacy.

“What it translates to is lives changed,” she said. “When I see sales, I see lives changed.”

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