

THE SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2009

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ONE DOLLAR

THE ART OF SURVIVAL

International Folk Art Market provides vital income for families, helps to keep skills alive

By Staci Matlock
The New Mexican

This weekend's popular Santa Fe International Folk Art Market on Museum Hill does more than keep traditional skills alive.

For many artists, it is their own survival. "We are helping Palestinian women who

live in refugee camps in the Gaza Strip increase their income to support their families and keep their heritage alive," said Hind El-Arabi, administrator of the Sulafa Embroidery Shop, represented at booth 63 in the market. It is one of 130 booths showing work by 132 artists from 46 countries.

Sulafa provides materials and training to

500 refugee women in Gaza, then markets the products and pays the artisans. The income is vital to Palestinian women who've lost the male bread-winners in their families through divorce or death. "They haven't any support," El-Arabi said.

The Sulafa program saw a leap in applicants after the recent clashes between Israel and Hamas left many Palestinians dead.

"They lost husbands, brothers and sons," El-Arabi said as she showed brightly and

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Jane Phillips/The New Mexican

Don MacLane tests out a singing bowl at the UNESCO booth at the Folk Art Market on Saturday. Thousands of people attended the sixth annual event.

Survival: An army of 1,300 volunteers helps the artists, guides buyers

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intricately embroidered dresses, scarves and pillowcases. "The embroidery helps them survive and support their families."

Like many of the items at the market, it can take the artists two to three months to embroider, weave or paint their wares, working six to nine hours a day. El-Arabi said women who have embroidered for years end up with weak eyes and often need glasses to continue the painstaking, detailed work.

Last year, buyers spent enough that the average artisan went home with \$16,000.

Thousands of visitors and locals thronged the market Saturday. They fingered soft shawls made of pashmina goat wool, oohed over jewelry and watched in wonder as Bertha Medina Aquino of the Andes demonstrated her detailed gourd painting with burning cord. An army of 1,300 volunteers helped the artisans, guided buyers and answered questions.

Nearby, Ghulam Sarwar of Pakistan began decorating a white Santa Fe municipal truck with flamboyantly painted birds and symbols, part of the truck artistry he's practiced for 40 years. City Hall provided the truck so Sarwar could demonstrate a craft that dates to the 1950s, when artisans began using buses, trucks, rickshaws, boats and tankers as their canvases.

Sarwar and nine other truck artists are sponsored by Anjum Rana, a woman devoted to protecting the folk art style.



Photos by Jane Phillips/The New Mexican

From left, Shell Goldman and Jennifer Ryan enjoy dancing to live music Saturday at the sixth annual Santa Fe International Folk Art Market. The market continues on Museum Hill from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. today. Tickets are \$5.

She realized the art form could transfer well to carved wooden boxes, clocks, frames, household items and even model trucks.

She provides the artists with objects and paint, then helps them sell the results. "I wanted to help bring this art to others," Rana said. "This is an art form that is not respected at home. They think it is too flashy and from the street."

Rana, Sarwar and the other truck artists were awarded a

UNESCO seal of excellence award for handicrafts in 2008. Rana said the art form faces competition from corporate advertisers who now cover buses with painted advertisements. "This is a dying art," she said. "We need to preserve it and that's why we paint these other objects."

All the artisans spent the prior week in workshops designed to help them increase their businesses, learning everything from reaching new

markets to building a Web site. They also learned about traditional New Mexico folk art such as beadwork, colcha embroidery, and retablo painting during a tour at Los Luceros Ranch in Alcalde.

While more than 140 artists were accepted to the sixth annual market, several faced problems getting passports or visas and were unable to come. One artisan from India was blocked when his visa request was denied, despite a last-min-



From left, David Mendoza of Bali looks over textiles from Mohammed Yusuf Khatri of India.

BY THE NUMBERS

Artists at first market (2004): **70**
Artists this year: **132**
Number of countries represented: **46**
Number of market visitors in 2008: **20,400**
Sales in 2008: **\$2 million**
Percent retained by artisans: **90 percent**

Source: Santa Fe International Folk Art Market

ute plea by U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M.

"When we lose our artists it breaks our hearts," said the market's executive director Charlene Cerny. "Everyone who makes it to the market is kind of a miracle. It takes a lot of money and time for these people to get here."

Ironically, Cerny said, organizers had an easier time getting people from Palestine into the country than they did several artists from Mexico this year.

Market-goers also enjoyed the music of various musicians who played on a central stage while people danced. Near the entrance to the Museum of International Folk Art, Ayo Adeyemi, a master Nigerian drummer, invited children to try out a drum. Adeyemi was on his way to the market last year when he and his 11-year-old son were in a car accident near Flagstaff, Ariz. His son, a budding drummer, died. But Adeyemi was at the market this year, happy to pass along his skills and love of drumming.

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