

THE TRAVEL ISSUE

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HORSE&style

M A G A Z I N E

Golden Ocala

Golf & Equestrian Club

DESTINATION: AFRICAN SAFARI

TRAVEL: PATAGONE • **LOS OLIVOS:** A CURATED COASTAL EXPERIENCE

2017

Going Global and Giving Back



GLOBAL GIRLS

In 2008, Linda Hackett was at a crossroads in her career. She wanted to combine her creative background, her love for travel, and her experience within the fashion industry with a profession that would really mean something, that would enable her to make a difference in the world. And, on a personal note, she wanted to visit Africa. Not long after, she created Global Girls.

IMPROVING THE LIVES OF OTHERS

Hackett first saw a pair of African sandals while attending a documentary filmmakers screening about Kenya. "When I first saw the Kenyan sandals, I was enthralled," said Hackett. "Then the filmmaker told me that the sandals were handmade primarily by disenfranchised Kenyan women, many of whom were living with HIV/AIDS, and right then I knew I wanted to lend a hand. My immediate thought was that I could commercialize the sandals in the US with hopes of providing fair-trade jobs for the women artisans, thus helping to improve their lives."

Prior to this, Hackett's professional experience included years of working as a wardrobe stylist, as well as an international buyer and designer. Her livelihood had depended upon her ability to recognize exceptional items of interest, and having spent years scouring the globe for unique and marketable products, she knew at once that she'd found something special.

"My gut told me other women would love these sandals, just as I did, and for the same reasons. They were not only beautiful and well-made, but comfortable. My home-base of Southern California is one of the 'sandal capitals of the world' where many women wear sandals year-round. I thought, 'What a perfect match,' helping women help themselves by developing a market for products that we are already so committed to. What's more, my years of experience importing handmade Mexican folk art gave me the confidence that I had the skills to do this."

Hackett had never been to Africa, but had always dreamed of visiting the beautiful and diverse continent, especially the sub-Saharan region. She began taking the sandals to retail buyers in California, and her hunch about the positive market response was confirmed as order after order was taken. Not long after she was off to Kenya to meet with the artisans, where they began to organize the process of having the sandals made to meet market demand. "Now, nine years and seventeen trips to Kenya later, I can say that I have reached my initial goal of providing good paying jobs to help many Kenyan women."

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Global Girls specializes in handmade sandals and belts. They also have a line of one-of-a-kind handbags made from rare, vintage Kuba cloth. Hackett tries





to introduce a few new styles every six months so the line is constantly fresh, but the classic styles that have been around since day one have become staples and are still very much in demand.

Hackett notes that both the sandals and belts offer wide-ranging appeal. “There’s something for everyone, whether the customer prefers a little silver bling or finds the colorful, African-inspired designs more pleasing. While there are many great sandal styles, for the woman who needs a bit of extra comfort, the wedges are extremely popular. It’s a discreet wedge, not clunky or oversized, and the comfort it provides is akin to wearing running shoes. I challenge customers to try them on to see what I mean, and no one’s argued with me so far! We also welcome custom orders for those

who have special foot needs – larger sizes, extra narrow, extra wide, you name it.”

Hackett is proud of the growth she’s had with Global Girls in the nine years she’s been in business. “While the sandals are found among exclusive brands in upscale boutiques, I am most proud of having expanded our workforce from five talented artisans when I first started to a steady workforce of about 200! In addition to the handbags and the beaded leather belts, especially popular with equestrians, we’ve also expanded our product range to include beaded dog collars and leashes.”

THE EQUESTRIAN MARKET
While Hackett herself is not an equestrian, she counts many as friends, and that’s how she realized her products resonated within

the horse community. “I have always had a lifelong love of horses, and though I am not a skilled rider myself, I attend numerous horse shows, and many equestrians are loyal customers. The interaction I have with them is priceless – they frequently give me ideas as to what they’re looking for, what they like (or don’t like), and how the shoes and belts fit. This information is essential for any business like mine.”

Equestrians like to look stylish both in and out of the saddle, and Hackett knows her products meet those requirements. “Our equestrian customers truly recognize and count on the quality and workmanship of our products. They enjoy the comfort, design, and originality of our sandals and belts.” Whether at a horse show, around the stable, or out for a night on the town, these versatile accessories rise to the occasion.

Hackett sees a bright future for her company. “Though many brick-and-mortar stores are struggling from online competition nowadays, I still believe there’s a place for a Global Girls storefront. Having a stationary storefront would be a natural extension of our booth where we sell sandals and belts at horse shows and special events across the country. So many customers have feet that do not fit in shoes that are produced in the standard assembly-line. I am one of those people. Our customers welcome the personal attention we provide when helping them find a pair of sandals that’s a perfect fit on their feet and in their wardrobe.”

Although the future is unknown, Hackett is certain that Global Girls will continue to move forward. With a loyal customer base that loves the notion of helping women by providing fair-trade jobs for excellent, quality products, how can it not? As the owner of Global Girls, Hackett considers herself blessed to have founded and now run a company that does global good from the artisans in Africa to the soles in the States. **H&S**

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