

Zumi's keeps world view, expands store

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Following extensive renovations to its Market Street shop, Zumi's Espresso & Ice Cream is planning a three-day Café Open House Aug. 24-26 to celebrate its new look.

Zumi's owners Umesh and Zillie Bhujju anticipate a festive three days, including casual acoustic music and free samples of selected baked goods, desserts and espresso drinks. They're open for business now in their expanded space and have just a few finishing touches to make before the event.

Two years after launching Zumi's in the long, narrow space it first occupied, loyal customers were clamoring for more tables at which to sit and savor their coffee and ice cream. When the lease in the building adjacent to Zumi's expired, Umesh Bhujju negotiated with the landlord to break down the wall between the two spaces in order to double the size of his shop.

"We made an effort to keep it feeling down to earth, warm and inviting," said Zillie Bhujju of the renovations that feature an elegant copper back splash, warm, earthy red and cream-colored walls and plenty of new seating. An inlaid compass is the focal point of the new, colorful tiled floor, and a world map has found a prominent spot on the wall. Both mirror their interest in the world as one interdependent community.

"We kept saying we wanted this to be a big improvement, but we didn't want it to be a completely different place. We wanted to maintain the home-grown feeling Zumi's started out with and people grew to love," Zillie Bhujju said.

Zumi's offers only Fair-Trade organic coffees, an aspect of the business that is integral to the Bhujus' worldview. A native of Nepal and a former guide for Mt. Everest climbers, as well as an entrepreneur with an MBA, Umesh Bhujju said he is deeply committed to the ethical principles that inspired the Fair-Trade movement.



Barbara DiLorenzo and her son Rennie relax at a table at Zumi's, while Umesh and Zillie Bhujju take a break with 2 1/2-year-old Uma, infant Maya, and 12-year-old Danvers cousin Marcelle. (Photo By Faith Tomei)

"As citizens of the world - and consumers within it - it is vital that people understand where the products they buy come from, and that they help to ensure that the workers who produce those products are paid well enough that they can invest in their own communities," he said.

When that happens in the coffee bean industry, Bhaju explained, not only are the beans fresher and of better quality, but the standard of living is raised for the workers. When they are paid a living wage, as guaranteed by the Fair-Trade cooperatives that arrange for workers to sell their coffee beans directly to retailers, workers can invest in better farming techniques, which result in a healthier environment. They can also put money back into their communities by building health clinics and schools. That good cycle, created by the Fair-Trade movement, is simply better for the world, Bhaju said. (See related article.)

The Bhujus view Zumi's as more than just a coffee shop. They see it as a focal point for the community, said Zillie Bhaju. In addition to working with her husband at Zumi's, she is a licensed social worker. She believes that Fair Trade, caring for and enjoying the environment, and local issues and politics all blend.

Zillie is busy these days with 2-and-a-half-year-old Uma and 10-week-old Maya. Luckily, the Bhujus have loyal employees who joined them when they opened more than two years ago.

"They take good care of customers. I tell them they are the face of Zumi's. We get positive feedback about our staff," Umesh Bhaju said, adding that young people hired in high school come back to work on college breaks and in summers.

The Bhujus will continue their bulletin board devoted to the adventures of their customers, posting photographs and postcards sent by them from their travels around the country and the world.