

Nepalese and Greek cultures form perfect blend

MOUNTAIN GROWN

by Alison D'Amario

Umesh Bhujus is a man for all seasons. Want to climb Mt. Everest? He's your guide.

Interested in life in Nepal? Ask Umesh. Concerned about the well being of coffee growers in third world countries? Stop by Zumi Espresso and Ice Cream in Ipswich, enjoy a delicious coffee, and talk to Umesh about Fair Trade. In fact Umesh, a member of the Newar tribe in Nepal, and his Greek-American wife, Zillie (and little daughter Uma Pumori), are a one-family blend of cultures who share a love of adventure and commitment to helping others.

The story of this young Topsfield couple explains their dedication to each other and to others. Zillie, daughter

of Leo and Lambro Theodorou who own Topsfield House of Pizza, is a clinical social worker. Now that Uma is 14 months old, Zillie is thinking of volunteering at the Tri-Town Council and will eventually return to social work. In the meantime, she handles the marketing and bookkeeping for Zumi.

A world away, Umesh grew up in a small village near Annapurna. He speaks Nepali and his tribal language, one of 36 languages to be heard in a country of 22 million people. His father was a UNICEF engineer. The family moved frequently, and before long Umesh was into climbing. After high school, he went to mountain school; in three months he was certified for ice and rock climbing.

Meeting Americans inspired him to apply as an exchange student to the International Camp Counselor

Program that brought him to Alabama, where he taught teenagers soccer and rock climbing. He returned to Nepal as the trek leader with the first New England Everest expedition in the spring of 1991. Convinced that he wanted to continue his education in New England, Umesh received a BS from Boston University, and an MBA from Johnson and Wales University.

Zillie and Umesh met at a residential program for autistic children here in New England. The match was made, and the adventure began. In 1998 the couple completed a three-week trek to the Mt. Everest base camp. On that trip Umesh and Zillie became engaged at the Buddhist monastery. They returned to Nepal in 2001, where Zillie completed a three-week program in social work.

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The Bhujus have settled in Topsfield, but their interests and commitment, focused now in the operation of Zumi, reach across the world.

The coffee served at Zumi is 100 percent organic and 100 percent Fair Trade. This means that the beans for coffee you drink at the Bhujus' shop — and there is an impressive selection — were bought at a price that helps small growers and cooperatives in third world countries survive. Umesh believes, "This is a better way of running a business and helping farmers and helping the eco-system." He researched the International Fair Trade Association and found that today about 800,000 farmers and their families in about 40 countries

benefit from Fair Trade certification.

Zillie and Umesh "liked the whole idea" of supporting struggling coffee growers around the world.

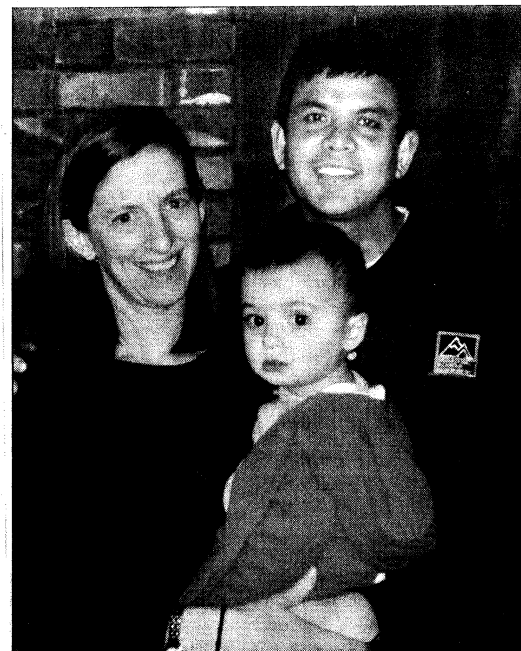
To inform their customers about the program they are hosting a World Fair Trade Day on May 8 (and for the rest of that week) at Zumi. Samples of Fair Trade coffee and brochures about the program will be available. The Bhujus plan to spread the word to churches and schools to educate people about Fair Trade coffee beans.

The Bhujus family continues to seek adventure and new ways to help others.

Recently, Umesh narrated a spectacular slide presentation at the Audubon Sanctuary in Topsfield. Beautiful (and terrifying) slides of a Mt. Everest climb left no doubt about

Umesh's courage and skill, while scenes of villages and temples in Nepal gave viewers a sense of life in that tiny country. Far away from those mountains now, Umesh has learned to skin dive in Gloucester, and admits that he "likes the ocean, too," but the possibility of more climbs in Nepal is always there. The Bhujus hope to take Uma Pumori to meet her Nepalese family soon, and maybe even to visit her great-grandmother in Greece. In the meantime, the Tibetan Buddhist prayer flags (*Lungta*) that fly at both Zumi and the Bhujus' Topsfield home, remind Umesh and Zillie that their prayers for the welfare of others are being carried around the world.

* facts taken from USA Today 2/16/04



Zillie, Umesh and daughter Uma.

photo by Alison D'Amario