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COMMUNITY IS KEY

## Hopeful Opportunities

A Vermont-based business sells cards and helps pull women out of poverty

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Women in India use native flowers to create handcrafted note cards.

**A**t six years old, Evan Goldsmith glimpsed his future in the pages of *National Geographic*. “There was a feature on the Himalayas,” he explains. “The area seemed incredibly new and exotic, and I had a gut feeling I wanted to go there.” He finally did travel to the Himalayas after graduating from college in 1992, and the experience eventually led to the creation of Hope for Women, a for-profit business that pays Indian women a living wage to handcraft greeting cards sold in the U.S.

Before starting Hope for Women, Evan worked in the Himalayas with a nonprofit group devoted to women’s development and environmental issues. While there, he admired the beautiful note cards Indian women were making with native flowers and plants. The women’s efforts, however, failed to generate enough income to live on, so they had to rely on low-paying domestic jobs or subsistence farming for additional revenue. Seeing a social need and a business opportunity, Evan started Hope for Women with a mission of providing sustainable employment for economically disadvantaged women.

Though he was passionate about the company’s aims, Evan knew that he also needed business acumen to make the endeavor work. He didn’t have to look far. Evan recruited his father, David Goldsmith, to

join him. “My father was a logical partner because he could tap into more than 40 years of incredible business experience,” Evan says.

Jeannie Lynch, Director of Key4Women—a comprehensive program dedicated to assisting women in business—met the Goldsmiths after they came to Key needing banking services. “When I first talked with them, I thought, ‘What is it about the energy between these two?’” Lynch recalls. “Not only are they trying to change things globally, they’re doing it as father and son. I love that.”

With Evan serving as president and David as chairman, Hope for Women, located in Burlington, Vermont, launched in 2004 by selling cards through a Website. Soon they began courting retail shops and today distribute cards to more than 250 stores throughout the country, including major retailers like Whole Foods Market®. Meanwhile, the women who make the cards continue to reap benefits from that growth. Evan reports that Hope for Women is now able to pay the women a monthly stipend in addition to a set price per card, which gives them even greater financial security.

Evan attributes the company’s success to maintaining a balance between social responsibility and smart business practices. “The mission is part of who we are, obviously,” he says. “But it’s also about the quality of product at a competitive price. We’ve learned that if you’re also able to embrace social concerns, such as fair trade and environmental awareness, you’ve really got something.”