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## Vote with your dollars: It's no sweat

By Layton Ehmke Homer Tribune  
September 12, 2007

The Harper's Magazine article Jeff Ballinger wrote disclosing Nike's controversial sweatshop labor practices sparked an anti-sweatshop debate and opened up a can of worms that just keeps on squirming. It also incited activism within businessman Adam Neiman, who decided to start speaking with his dollars. Neiman is finding common ground between Jews and Muslims in war-torn Bethlehem by promoting a concept of humanity. He gave those grieving a means to life through meaningful and fair work when he re-opened a textile factory in Bethlehem.



Image provided

The factory, Al Arja, sits within the municipality of Bethlehem, and was equipped with high-speed knitting equipment in the 1990s. Now, Neiman uses it to churn out T-shirts in the heart of the Middle East. Last summer, he showed up just as war was breaking out between Hezbollah and Israel. Six months later, the first shipment of 10,000 shirts went on sale.

"Apparently we've found the one piece of common ground all sides can agree on — more good jobs for Palestinians in Palestine will help the situation," Neiman said. "It's a small piece of common ground, about the size of a t-shirt, but there's a chance that if we build on that, it just might turn out to be the most precious piece of real estate in the Middle East today."

NoSweat Shop apparel can be found through a local vendor, or online at nosweatapparel.com.

The factory employs about 70 unionized Palestinians who earn above minimum wage.

"What's incredible is that we have all the basics," Neiman said. "The cotton is organic, so it protects the environment. The factory is a union shop, so it safeguards the rights of the workers. The product is made in Palestine, so it promotes peace, prosperity and democratic institutions in the Middle East."

As Neiman became increasingly aware of sweatshops as a problem on an international scale, he took up the cause. His intention was to go beyond identifying the problem by actually doing something about it. And as he thought about how big corporations become so successful in the west, he realized they gained huge power via a relatively simple philosophy: give people what they want.

"One thing I got clearly was the sense, on both sides, that they were being played like pawns by a much larger gang," Neiman said. "It's a differentiated horror show. A lot of Palestinians are living their lives in wistful bewilderment, knowing there was a time when Arabs and Jews got along. They worry about that living memory soon being lost."

With 130 retail clothing dealers across the country, most of which are Fair Trade, eclectic or independent stores, Neiman said his next move is to market blank shirts to Jewish, Muslim and Christian schools and camps.

"We're stepping into a maelstrom of religious conflict with a secular approach," Neiman said. Being a Jewish-American businessman, how did he get the permission to travel to Gaza?



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Simple. He asked.

“I’ve learned a few things,” Neiman said. “Know who to ask, how to ask, never expect no, but be prepared to accept no.”

Shaher Saed, General Secretary of the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions, was impressed with Neiman’s tenacity from the beginning.

“That an American Jewish businessman has come to us means very much,” Saed said. “Neiman will provide jobs for Palestinian workers who are now unemployed.”

Some of the designs on the clothing that Neiman creates speak to his concept of secular survival — and you can find those designs in Homer.

Michelle LaFreniere sells the apparel at White Earth Tile on the Homer Spit.

She said she knows that for every piece of “No Sweat” apparel she sells, one more person will be spending his or her time in front of a sewing machine rather than behind a machine gun.

Wages for workers include healthcare and 14 paid holidays. Child labor is strictly prohibited and nobody works more than 48 hours per week.

If you want to feel a little better about what you’re wearing, and don’t want to step on the worker who made your shoes, check out “No Sweat” online at [www.nosweatshop.com](http://www.nosweatshop.com), or stop by White Earth Tile on the Spit.

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