Hearts & Crafts

November 1, 2001 By Stephen Winter

Attention, shoppers! Here's the remedy for that holiday what-to-buy horror: gifts that give twice. Visit www.ArtAIDSAfrica.com and for a mere $10 to $50, you'll score one of a generous array of handcrafted beauties from Zimbabwe, Ghana, South Africa or Malawi. These are not your average tchotchkes. Mixed in with premium examples of the typical tourist grab (masks, carvings and batiks) are the thrillingly exotic, like a picture frame made of richly hued baobab bark ($12) and an earth-toned stationery set made from elephant-dung pulp ($10). Ho, ho, ho!

You'll also be helping African AIDS service organizations fight the good fight. ArtAIDSAfrica is the brainchild of Atlanta-based gastroenterologist Shirley Harris, MD, and her sister Folami, a public health specialist and student of African art (who selects the merchandise with an eye for quality and a sly sense of humor). The two women decided to put together their e-commerce/philanthropy outfit last year, after witnessing firsthand the titanic struggle of AIDS work in Africa.

Since then, ArtAIDSAfrica has raised over $40,000 in donations and sales. "Imagine trying to teach about AIDS in a freezing 6-foot-square shack with no blackboards, paper or chair," Harris says. "Through art we are replacing that shack with a clean walk-in center for the Diepsloot Township and providing goods and toiletries directly to PWAs."

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