

New retailer for cultural understanding

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PETERSBURG - The latest addition to the shopping mile in historic Old Towne is "The Cultural Village," which opened yesterday.

The little shop is different than most small businesses in the area, promising to bring "a splash of culture" to the city as a fair-trade retail store offering handmade products from all over the world.

Taliah Muhammad, who owns the shop with her mother Zakiyyah, says that in a climate of nationwide Islamophobia, they faced some opposition from some in community - because of their Muslim faith.

"There was definitely resistance from some," Muhammad said. "People tried to discourage us from our vision and we received lots of negative feedback because we don't hide our faith," she said.

The Muhammads want to take the fear and criticism of Islam and turn it into something positive.

"We want to promote cultural connection," Muhammad said. "No matter what culture or religion you come from, when you come here you can connect with everybody through creativity."

A small business as a platform for cultural understanding and tolerance - this is the vision of The Cultural Village.

Both women live in Dinwiddie County.

For Zakiyyah Muhammad, the new store is an extension of her first business, The Cultural Corner, which she opened 20 years ago just up the road.

"But my old store mainly focused on African garments, and it wasn't about fair-trade retail," she said.

For the new store, she teamed up with her daughter, who is an economics student.



Muhammad surveys the offerings inside The Cultural Village, which is located in Old Towne. She owns the shop with her mother Zakiyyah.

"When we found out about fair-trade, we decided that this is for us," Taliah Muhammad said. "We wanted to open a store, but we also wanted to give back - to our community and to people all over the world."

The goal is to sell merchandise from across the world, but to help disadvantaged artists locally and globally by marketing their crafts and giving them the platform of exposure.

The Cultural Village sells home décor items, clothing, scarfs and accessories, such as jewelry, from Africa, Pakistan, India and other places.

Among the special items on sale this week are Zulu wire baskets, made from recycled phone wires by men of the Zulu tribe in Africa.

The Muhammads were able to open their business after raising personal capital and a loan through Enterprise Virginia, a statewide public-private partnership for asset building and micro-enterprise development.

The Cultural Village is located at 133C N. Sycamore St.

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