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Direct from Market: Chicago

By *Meredith Schwartz -- Gifts and Dec, July 28, 2010*

Chicago — Jerry Greenfield, of Ben & Jerry's ice cream fame, delivered the keynote address on Monday afternoon to a large crowd in the adjoining Holiday Inn's ballroom. His speech focused on the history of the company and how to integrate doing good into a business plan. "The solution," he said, "is to do the things that both help the community and help make money." Examples included having stores run by non-profits and buying from suppliers that hire special needs employees. He also emphasized that businesses which want to do good need to measure their impact just as they do the bottom line. He highlighted the growing importance of Fair Trade - Ben and Jerry's has pledged to use all Fair Trade ingredients by 2013. And the importance of bringing ice cream, even if it makes you late.

He practiced what he preached: attendees were each given a cup of free ice cream on their way out. And ice cream wasn't the only treat on offer at the market: Saturday's Shop Late Night featured chefs from 11 big name Chicago restaurants.

Despite selling out its temporary space, the Merchandise Mart found room to donate a booth to local artisan Devora Fisher of [Frames by Devora](#), who has significant developmental disabilities. She decorates the frame using specially designed mittens. The line is designed to raise awareness of Fisher's illness, Agenesis of the Corpus Callosum, and the Illinois state laws regarding handicapped individuals, which stop supporting adults financially unless they are placed in an institution.

Some seven inches of rain drenched hopes for Saturday traffic, with multiple highways closed down, keeping many reps and retailers alike from reaching the Mart. Fortunately, Sunday dawned fresh and perfect, and to help encourage buyers to try again, the Merchandise Mart offered free parking on Sunday instead of its customary subsidized \$10 rate.

New and Notable

Standout product introductions that were new at this Chicago market include [Say It With Book Covers](#). Originally developed by



Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream

a retailer as a display prop, customer demand encouraged him to first, sell it in his own store; and then offer it as a wholesale product through Creative Visions, a rep with whom he has a long time relationship. The kit, which retails for about \$20, includes three book covers which, when stacked, spell out a classic quote, as well as a couple of blanks to set them off. Sure to be a hit with designers and home stagers, too.

Another eye-catching offering that's new to the Chicago market is customized wedding wall-art with images based on vintage posters. Retailers display a sample, and engaged couples can place their order from a catalog, as they do with invitations - speaking of which, coordinating invitations, thank you and save the date cards are also available, and can be purchased independently.



Also unique were the Versus mittens from Hoopla. Sold in coordinating pairs of animals such as frog and fly, one to each hand, they double as puppets which can be made to fight one another (not to mention an easy way to tell which mitten goes on which hand at a glance).

All Dolled Up

Fashion Accents were trending decidedly eco-friendly at the Chicago market, with many of the most eye-catching offerings having a green tinge. [Dunitz & Co.](#) featured pendants made from reused antique watch faces for a steampunk twist on her Fair

Alexander and Co.

Trade beaded offerings. [Natalie Allan Designs](#) featured scarves and other items

made out of recycled afghan blankets by the artist herself. [ReFashioned](#) offers fun colorful jewelry made from recycled buttons, puzzle pieces, toys and even gift cards (talk about the gift that keeps on giving). And Planet Saver Sacks by Cindy McGrath give the ever-present reusable bag and its message a pulp makeover sure to please fans of retro graphics from Anne

Taintor to comic books.

Meanwhile, speaking of sustainable materials, wood is trending up in fashion: we spotted several companies offering wooden beaded belts, including Echo Naturals from [Benjamin Intl.](#) and [Pink House Imports](#).

And, of course, the interchangeability craze is hot in Chicago as it is all over the country; besides the usual suspects, [Branelli](#) interchangeable earring system offers packaging that includes earrings plus extra beads.



Planet Saver Sacks

For Kids

[Crazy Bands](#) debuted new Crazy Frogs, with solid additions around the outside of the bands, such as webbed feet and a



Say It With Book Covers



Dunitz & Co.

long, curling tongue, so the animal shape is more recognizable even when the band is stretched out around somebody's wrist.

[Curious Chef](#) offers real cooking utensils, not toys, for tweens, with new SKUs like all-plastic kitchen shears. Available in open stock or in sets such as pizza party.

Anywhere becomes the time out corner with Park It Portable Time-Out Mat from [Doodle & Juju](#), a colorful, design-y 15" fabric mat that moms can carry on the go.

[Back Yard Laundry LLC](#) stackable storage bins come in small and large sizes and are made of recycled plastic. (Small size will fit three to a standard shelving unit). Available with or without the graphics — one retailer told the company she plans to paint the recipient's name on each bin by hand.



Doodle and Juju

Right At Home

[Lace Pottery](#), handmade by artist Maggie Weldon, is food- and dishwasher-safe porcelain inspired by original and vintage lace patterns. Worthy of a Martha Stewart-style table, a spring display, a Mother's Day high tea or a shabby chic dinner table, the line only debuted in January and has already been picked up by the Food Network's Tyler Florence and the Boston Museum of Art.

Remember those bendable necklaces that came on the scene last year? [Aesthetic Movement](#) is turning them into jewelry for the home by making napkin rings out of the distinctive metallic strands.

In candles, WoodWick from [Virginia Candle Co.](#) has applied its signature wooden wick to pillar candles, not just jars. And [Paddywax](#) goes literary with the Library collection, featuring classic authors such as Jane Austen, Walt Whitman and Edgar Allan Poe.

Just for Fun

[Diane Shaw Designs](#) sees success in the cards. Her line of greeting cards based on iconic playing card graphics will be a hit with everyone from poker to bridge enthusiasts, plus those who just appreciate eye-catching imagery with a simple sentiment.

Crowds were buzzing around the booth of [Two Fat Guys Gourmet Sauces](#), clamoring for samples. Their signature BBQ sauce comes in mild, smoky, spicy and lava hot.

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The advertisement is set against a dark green background. On the left, a red-bordered box contains four holiday-themed gift tags: a green tag with a holly leaf, a red tag with a holly leaf, a green tag with a Christmas tree, and a green tag with a holly leaf. To the right of the box, the text 'DII' is written in large, white, serif letters, with 'FOR THE HOME' in smaller, white, sans-serif letters below it. Below the logo, the text 'Visit us online & register NOW to receive 5% OFF your first ONLINE ORDER!' is written in a mix of red and white. A small green holly leaf graphic is positioned above the website address 'www.designimports.com' at the bottom.

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