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Retail Report

Earthentree sells eco-friendly toys from India



By **Melissa Allison** and **Amy Martinez**
Seattle Times business reporters

For parents whose young children are used to playing with Tickle-me-Elmos and LeapFrog Leapsters, a wooden pull-along toy or abacus might seem hopelessly old-fashioned.

But Earthentree in Kirkland is capturing parents' attention by promising something other than flashing lights and funny noises: peace of mind.

Earthentree's toys are handmade in India out of sustainable wood and colored with vegetable dyes, meaning no lead paint, said owner Deepti Shankar.

"I joke that children get their five color vegetables if they put the toys in their mouth," she said.

Living in Kirkland with her wireless-consultant husband and 2-year-old daughter, Shankar bemoans that "everyone's house is like Toys R

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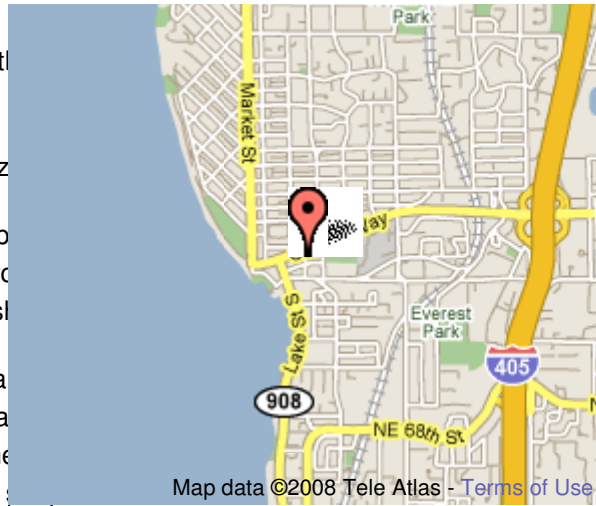
Deepti Shankar created Earthentree in her Kirkland home. Her eco-friendly toys are made with sustainable wood and vegetable dyes in the Indian village she is from. Her daughter, Tara, 2, plays with a toy named "Peppy Five."

Us." She promotes Earthenree as an alternative to mass-produced, battery-operated toys, believing that on a factory line."

"Sometimes, you can see the wood grains, or the size

An art historian originally from India, Shankar, 34, spent her adult literacy in her home country for a British nonprofit to spare bedroom to make money and to do good. "It's

Earthenree employs 30 toy makers in Channapatna, India, with prices ranging from \$4.50 for a bird whistle to \$64 for a 20-piece train set. The increasing number of specialty retailers, including the Trillium gift shop on the Island, and Bellevue Botanical Garden's Trillium gift



"They're just good old-fashioned toys that will last and last forever," said Jan Lyon, a buyer for the Trillium. "And with the danger of some toys that we keep hearing about, these just seem to be so safe, so well-done."

At the Seattle Green Festival this weekend, Earthenree will be among a dozen child-focused exhibitors, joining makers of cloth diapers, dolls with sustainable materials and games designed to nurture respect for the environment. The festival takes place at the Washington State Convention & Trade Center from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday and from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday.

Shankar hopes to develop Earthenree into a million-dollar-a-year company, but she talks about meeting sales projections more as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. Besides paying employees in India decent wages, she said, she's trying to line up health-care checkups for them and their families. She also wants to bring employees from India to the U.S. to teach school children about making toys.

As it happens, Shankar's goals appear to resonate with consumers at a time when social responsibility and environmental stewardship are unlikely buzzwords.

"I usually order about 300 toys of each piece, and by the end of the month, I run out," she said.

— Amy Martinez

Tidbits

Pyramid Breweries has hired Paul Curhan as vice president of marketing and brand development. Curhan had been vice president of marketing at Taco Del Mar since 2006. Before that, he worked in marketing at Pyramid, X10 Wireless Technology, Tully's Coffee, Starbucks, Amazon.com, Procter & Gamble and Haagen-Dazs.

Pyramid also began selling Pyramid Crystal Wheat Ale through Pacific Northwest grocery stores and other retailers. The ale was previously

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available only at Pyramid's alehouses. — MA

SuperValu is launching its own line of organic and natural foods called Wild Harvest. They will be sold in SuperValu stores, including Albertsons, Jewel-Osco and Cub Foods. The line will offer about 150 products at first, from eggs to pasta, then expand to include up to 300 products. — MA

Expedia.com in Bellevue has formed a partnership with San Francisco-based PlanetOut to add travel-booking capabilities to Web sites serving lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. Expedia said the partnership marks its first marketing effort targeting those communities. PlanetOut includes [Gay.com](#) and [PlanetOut.com](#). — AM

Starbucks will close 45 coffee shops at Save Mart Supermarket and Lucky Supermarket locations in Northern California and Nevada, MarketWatch reported. They are not part of the 100 underperforming U.S. stores that Starbucks has said it will close. — MA

The book chain Borders said last month it is exploring "strategic alternatives," which might include the sale of the Ann Arbor, Mich., company. Officials there and at Starbucks said they are not sure what a possible sale might mean for Seattle's Best Coffee, which Starbucks owns. SBC has about 530 stores, including 470 in Borders stores in the U.S. — MA

Amazon.com will loan a rare book of handwritten stories by J.K. Rowling to the winner of its Beedle the Bard Ballad Writing Contest. The winner gets a trip for two to London to spend a weekend with one of seven copies of "The Tales of Beedle the Bard," written by Rowling as a complement to the Harry Potter series. More information is at www.amazon.com/beedleballads. — AM

Zipfizz, an energy drink company in Mill Creek, said it will be distributed by Odom in Alaska, Washington and Oregon. Bellevue-based Odom also distributes Coca-Cola, Miller Beer and other alcoholic and nonalcoholic products in the Pacific Northwest. — MA

Edaleen Dairy will supply 7-Eleven stores in Washington and Oregon now that Wilcox Family Farms is closing its Washington state dairies. Edaleen is a family-owned dairy based in Lynden, Whatcom County. — MA

Retail Report appears Fridays. Melissa Allison covers the food and beverage industry. She can be reached at 206-464-3312 or mallison@seattletimes.com. Amy Martinez covers goods, services and online retail. She can be reached at 206-464-2923 or amartinez@seattletimes.com

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