

A Place in the Sun

Jenny's Handicrafts

Joven and Aurora Furio knew the hardships of a street vendor's life. They used to sell handicrafts on the sidewalks of Divisoria 10 years ago. Thanks to DTI, they are now manufacturers earning more, and sharing their opportunities with others and inspiring them to follow their success.



NATURAL FIT
Aurora and Joven Furio's skills are as natural as the *burf* palms that sprout and grow on their own around the company's production facility.



THE VERSATILE LEAF

The *buri* leaf is the most versatile material used in the handicraft industry. Weavers simply strip off the leaves then dry them under the sun. The dried leaves can now be easily dyed with striking colors before being woven into many shapes—from plain to intricate.

Joven and Aurora were not battle-hardened hawkers but natives of a remote town in the province of Sorsogon. The couple would travel to Manila only to peddle handwoven boxes made of the fibers from the dried fan-shaped *buri* leaves of the indigenous palm trees *Corypha microbachne*.

A decade after, the couple now supplies the upscale shops in Tiendesitas, Market! Market!, and Greenhills, including an exporter to Taiwan and Panama. Jenny's Handicrafts in Sorsogon's Sta. Magdalena town has proven that their hard work has paid off, but only after they found their market.

THE BIG BREAK

Tired of pounding the streets in Divisoria, Quiapo, and Kalantong in 2007, the couple eventually registered Jenny's Handicrafts with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) later that year and joined its One Town, One Product (OTOP) program for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSME).

DTI put them through a product development program involving technical workshops on the dye process and price quoting, among others. They were also linked with consultants who introduced new designs.

The couple's products—wine bags, hats, placemats, and tissue holders, among others—improved in sophistication and complexity, using accents, color, embossment, and 3-D patterns. These upgrades made the output eligible for DTI's selling missions that culminated in a big break at Manila FAME, the country's premier international design and lifestyle trade show.





THE BURI WEAVERS OF STA. MAGDALENA
Mostly housewives, these women spend the day huddled together under a hut, painstakingly weaving *buri* handicrafts.



ART WITH FUNCTION

Jenny's handicrafts produces artistically and functionally crafted *buri* bags, boxes, and wallets.

"We found the traders from Taiwan and Panama there," Joven says of the Manila FAME organized biannually by the DTI's Center for International Trade Expositions and Missions (CITEM).

The business originally belonged to Aurora's parents, who sold their products only in the province since the 1980s and turned it over to her sister in 1999.

However, Aurora's sister, a nurse, decided to work in Manila and passed the business over to the couple.

SUCCESS ISN'T JUST FOR THE COUPLE

"Our biggest order was worth Php 350,000 from a trader in Panama. We sold big boxes, sombreros, tote bags," Joven says. "We don't run out of orders now."

The rewards spill over to the community in Sta. Magdalena, Sorsogon, a fifth-class agricultural

town, which struggles from January to March, when the locals sit it out for the harvest season in summer. With few livelihood options during this period, farmers' wives and daughters weave for Joven and Aurora.

Distinguishing the place are the irrigation canals and the potholes of the rugged roads that remind visitors of the almost total inaccessibility of Jenny's Handicrafts to the rest of the world.

But to the couple, the visitors remind them that no place is too remote for a product worth coming for and deserves a space in the showrooms of Manila and beyond.

Finally, Jenny's Handicrafts has found its place in the sun.



DID YOU KNOW?

A *buri* palm tree can only bloom flowers once in its entire lifespan. After which, it will produce small round fruits before dying.



BUSINESS TIPS

- 1 **GO FOR BIGGER MARKETS.**
Jenny's Handicrafts expanded to markets in Manila and other countries, while Aurora's parents were only selling in their town.
- 2 **KNOW YOUR PRICE.**
Jenny's Handicrafts prices items with healthy margins in mind, while their in-laws agreed to prices dictated by buyers out to save the last centavo off the deal.
- 3 **GET REGISTERED.**
A duly registered business opens up opportunities. By registering Jenny's Handicrafts, the couple got DTI's support, which was inaccessible to Aurora's parents' informal business.
- 4 **PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT IS IMPORTANT.**
Through technical training and consultations, Jenny's Handicrafts created world-class craft items that attracted many high-end shops. The intricately designed baskets, bags, and wine packages are a far cry from Aurora's parents' simple and predictable *buri* boxes.
- 5 **SELL DIRECTLY.**
While Aurora's parents sold to subcontractors in their region, the couple made deals directly with traders. The result: bigger profits and wider network of potential clients.

HOW DTI HELPED

Jenny's Handicrafts was able to meet traders from Taiwan and Panama by showcasing their products at the *Sikat Pinoy* and Manila FAME exhibit.