

Proceeds from Pine church store to expand mission work

BY LAURIE REES

Several members of Salem United Methodist Church in Pine are expanding their church's mission outreach by venturing into the retail business.

They opened Olive Branch in December on Perry Highway in Pine. The nonprofit store stocks 1,300 unique gifts, hand-crafted jewelry items and household goods made by impoverished artisans from all over the world.

Its purpose is to help provide economic opportunities in developing countries. Profits from sales will be donated to local and international causes, and no money will go to the church.

In addition to the shop, Olive Branch is providing opportunities and space for community members to participate in hands-on missions. The first project will be sewing fabric



LOUIS RAGGIANTI | TRIBUNE REVIEW

Joyce Wanniger looks over some of the items for sale at Olive Branch, a store in Pine that stocks items made by impoverished artisans from around the world.

purses for girls in Zambia who cannot attend school during menstruation because they have nothing

in which to carry personal hygiene products. The store also will accept material donations for one

specific cause that will be announced each month. It will accept food donations for North Hills Community

If you go

Store: Olive Branch, featuring gift items made by impoverished artisans from around the world
Where: 11160 Perry Highway, Pine.
Hours: Winter hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays
Details: Operated by volunteers with Salem United Methodist Church, Pine

Outreach all year.

"Our first collection will be for plastic prescription or over-the-counter medicine bottles," said Vivian Sylvester, of Bradford Woods, who is helping to coordinate mission projects for Olive Branch.

"We'll send them to Malawi, where patients have to walk miles to see a doctor. When the doctor dispenses medicine, he wraps the pills in paper, and the pills drop out when the patients walk home."

The Rev. Beth Nelson, pastor at Salem United

Methodist, said she doesn't know of any other church that has started a store like Olive Branch. The church has nearly 200 members.

"It's awesome because we've moved the church out into the community. We're making a statement for what we believe in and our niche is our passion for mission," she said.

Olive Branch actually began 40 years ago when members of Salem's missions committee proposed a small store in, which fair trade items from around

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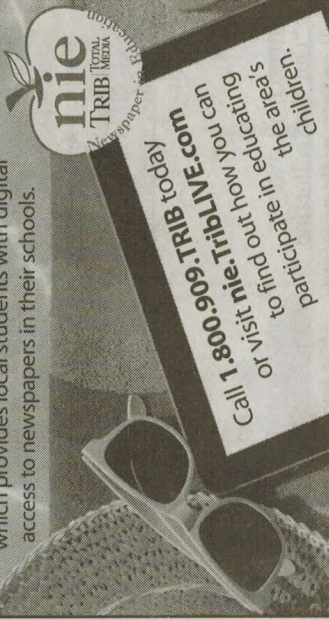
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New Year's Resolution for Your Planning

At the beginning of every year, people tend to evaluate their lives and determine what needs to be improved in the upcoming year. Your retirement and estate planning needs evaluated as well. Simply put, our financial world has severely changed over the last decade and continues to change. In fact, there are a lot of concerns going into 2016 with additional tax law changes set to take effect, markets near all-time highs, pension and entitlement program changes occurring and continued national spending and budget issues. With all these issues and more on the forefront of people's minds this year, it is no surprise that there will be a lot of New Year's resolutions that are financially related in 2016.

It is extremely important to evaluate your current retirement situation and look for areas that can be improved, no matter if you are still working or already retired. Think about your planning for a moment and ask yourself a couple questions. 1) "Have I made any proper adjustments in my planning lately?" 2) "Am I 100% sure that my/our retirement situation is set up the absolute best way for my/our unique and specific situation?" If your answer is "no" to either of these questions, then make it a New Year's resolution this year to get some valuable help. Find a qualified, competent, educated and experienced retirement specialist to make sure you are aware of and

Church store opens; proceeds help others

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Olive Branch sign outside the motel room to advertise.

"Every month, we asked ourselves if we were going to be able to sell enough to pay the rent for the motel room, which was \$100," said Mary Sheehan, of Marshall.

Two years later, Olive Branch moved to a small cottage on the grounds of the East and West International Restaurant in

Cranberry, which a church member owned. When the restaurant closed, Olive Branch relocated to a corner of the church basement, and store hours were restricted to November and December.

Moving the store into the Wexford retail corridor was a leap of faith.

"Being a church is totally different now than it was in the past," Sheehan said. "We have to spread beyond

our own four walls and get out into the community and provide opportunities for people to be involved."

To offset the \$750 monthly lease, Sheehan sought a grant from the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church in Cranberry, and appealed to Salem church members.

Laurie Rees is a Tribune-Review contributing writer.

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