

A Personal Look at the Lost Dutchman
Home Office Furniture • Urban Wildlife Pros & Cons

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THE PHX-FILES PEOPLE

edited by Kathy Khoury



Catherine Ryan (left) visiting a
tapestry artisan in Thailand

Wander Woman

Riding an elephant through a rainforest in Thailand to a Hmong hill tribe village, Phoenician CATHERINE RYAN, vice president of communications for the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC-affiliated world market website NOVICA.COM, sways atop the *boudab* with the elephant's lopsided lumber. Once at the village, a handful of residents gather around her as she inspects exquisitely embroidered clothes. Through interpreter PIA WUNNA, a regional representative of Novica.com, Ryan asks the Hmong embroiderer if she wants to sell her work. The woman nods her head and asks where. "To the world," Ryan answers, "via the internet."

Experiences like these are all in a day's work for Ryan. Novica.com links hundreds of the developing world's master artists to customers around the world. The company's credo — artists make more, consumers pay less, everybody wins — convinced Ryan to take the job.

"Novica's mission is to help artists who had no chance reach the world market and earn more for their work," Ryan explains. "This got me very excited. And the opportunity to meet these artists was a dream come true for someone like me who loves art and traveling."

Ryan started working for Novica two years ago as the website's editor. She also wrote a column, under the pen name WANDER WOMAN, about her experiences traveling and meeting artists. Her

job has evolved over the years from writer/editor into public relations guru and producer.

"Meeting fascinating people on the other side of the world and getting swept up in their lives is extraordinary enough," Ryan muses. "Then offering them direct access to the world on the internet and seeing them financially benefit from it, is really something."

Through Novica, Ryan has had some unusual experiences. A wire sculptor in Zimbabwe once asked her to hand-carry a sculpture of a saxophone to the WHITE HOUSE as a gift to President CLINTON. Through a series of serendipitous connections, Ryan successfully delivered the sculpture to Clinton's office. It ended up in a photo with Clinton on the front page of THE NEW YORK TIMES.

Ryan's recent publicity efforts have included a fund-raising project coordinated with Indonesian and Thai elephant preserves to display elephant-created paintings online. The website has already sold more than \$80,000 worth of elephant paintings, with half of all proceeds going directly to help feed and rescue other Asian elephants.

Ryan has recently returned to her editorial duties, and is writing a book about the artists she's worked with. After that, she may help produce a television show about the artists for the National Geographic channel.

— Christine Maxa