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T-shirt designers inspired by poor Mich. economy, donate proceeds to jobless citizens

By [Cole Bertso](#)s

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You're walking down the street with some friends when one of them asks you where your hometown is. Nonchalantly, you lift up your right hand, point out a spot on your palm and say, "Oh you know, right around here, but my parents are both from the tip of the thumb."

Your friends, all from out of state, are baffled.

Lisa Burnia and Terri O'Brien knew if they could tap into that natural Michiganian instinct and use it, they could produce something that could help the state in hard times.

"If you're not from Michigan, you don't really know what the mitten means," said O'Brien, of South Lyon. "But we know what it means."

Saddened by the auto bailout and the ensuing hardships that affect many families, Burnia and O'Brien were determined not to just sit around and watch it happen, but help those who might be struggling from it.

"It doesn't help to sit around and be so negative, so Terri and I are trying to put a positive spin on things," Burnia, of Northville, said. "It'll get better, but everybody's got to stick together — it's affecting everyone in Michigan."

So Burnia and O'Brien began their business creating and selling T-shirts to help benefit unemployed Michigan workers in the form of donations to Bridgepointe, Schoolcraft College Foundation and Gleaners in hopes to do their part to make a difference in their community.

"You don't realize (that by) doing something small, just how big it could be," Burnia said. "Our first donation was \$200 to each of the charities, but even if it's a small thing, it all adds up and we're hoping to just keep writing more checks."

In July, Burnia and O'Brien began selling their Michigan pride T-shirts at various locations, including the Ann Arbor Art Festival, and online at their Web site, www.yesmichigan.com.

O'Brien said one of the best parts of the shirts, which tote the phrases "michiCAN" and "Don't Mess With The Mitten," has been seeing the customers' excitement over their aesthetic. She also is proud of what the apparel stands for.

"Just seeing the compassion of the people who are buying them who really want to help the unemployed workers (moves me)," O'Brien said.

The first shop to begin carrying the shirts was the Dancing Eye Gallery, 101 N. Center St., in Northville, where owner Theresa Schierloh said the uplifting message is what made the choice for her.

"I liked the sentiment behind it," Schierloh said. "I definitely support my

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customers who have lost their jobs. I've had customers come and go because of jobs leaving Michigan."

Schierloh also adds that the sales are not limited only to individuals looking to support the Great Lakes state, but business owners looking to boost staff morale.

"I've actually had several customers of mine who own businesses purchase them for their entire staff," Schierloh said. "It's just a really positive message."

The choice of slogan seems to strongly depend on the buyer of the shirt, said Burnia, with most business and government interest lying in the "michiCAN" slogan while individuals, especially the younger crowd, tend to identify more with the "Don't Mess With The Mitten" variety.

"We printed (both slogans)," Burnia said. "I thought the big seller would be 'michiCAN,' but it's been 'Don't Mess With The Mitten.' It's a little sassy, and it's kind of an inside joke, but that's the big seller."

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