

Local roastery gives coffee and hope

by *Carla Thompson*

Part-time barista, Jessie Mueller, wasn't looking forward to her research assignment. She had only been working at the Phoenix Coffee house in Cleveland Heights, Ohio for two months when she was told to investigate one of the brands of coffee the locally owned chain sold and present her findings at a meeting later that week. The brand she was assigned: Café Femenino. The five-minute presentation ended up affecting her career and changing her worldview.

The Café Femenino Foundation was developed by the Organic Products Trading Company, and strives to enhance the welfare of women and children in coffee communities around the world. According to "Strong Coffee: The Story of Café Femenino", (an independently produced documentary) coffee is the second largest traded commodity in the world - behind oil- but it is primarily grown by rural indigenous people who live in extreme poverty.

Every step of the way, the growing, processing and decision making for Café Femenino coffee however, is owned and determined by women.

Sarah Wilson Jones, who owns Phoenix Coffee, decided to support Mueller, who is now the manager of the South Euclid Phoenix store, in her commitment to Café Femenino and their philanthropic projects. In December of 2008, the company took part in their second fundraiser for Café Femenino, A Coffee Childs Christmas.

"I wanted to continue the new tradition of Phoenix doing something during the holidays for the Cafe Femenino Foundation," explained Mueller.

The event was to inform their public about this special coffee and to raise donations for the annual A Coffee Child's Christmas. Contributing helps purchase for children of poor coffee producers who receive hot chocolate, Christmas bread, and a simple toy.

"I called all the store managers to arrange with them the way the tip money raised would be sent to the Foundation, I helped talk up the event, I educated the staff and customers about the event and Cafe Femenino," explained Mueller.

She also contacted barista Bonnie Kaczor, who is the store's co-coordinator of charitable donations.

" I enjoyed learning about the Cafe Femenino Foundation and the true meaning of giving to those who have so little," said Kaczor, who helped promote the event and provided an informational session about Café Femenino for staff and customers.

Customers were also treated to free samples of Peruvian and Mexican Café Femenino coffee, a children's story hour and a viewing of "Strong Coffee".

'I enjoyed the fact that although the gathering was smaller than I hoped for, the feelings that were in the room were not. The people who did attend were

enthralled with the story of Cafe Femenino, couldn't take their eyes away from the movie and the women's stories. I loved sitting back and watching my co-workers, customers and loved ones absorbing the wonder that had first drawn me to Cafe Femenino," said Mueller.

"It was so amazing to be able to witness the love, strength and compassion that I saw in these women far away in Peru, being acted out with this group of people in the cafe that night."

Many of the Phoenix baristas donated their tips for the day. This was added to community donations to give to A Coffee Child's Christmas. This year the Phoenix team managed to raise 1, 204.90 dollars. The local company hopes to do more next year.

"Yes, probably something similar and even more well-developed," said Kaczor. "I loved being involved with this project so much. I felt a small part of something great! I feel I learned a lot about the coffee and the women who lovingly produce it."

You can find out more about Café Femenino's products and mission by going online at www.cafefemeninofoundation.org. To learn more about viewings or to purchase a copy of Strong Coffee, visit www.strongcoffeefilm.com. For store locations and more information about Phoenix Coffee Company products and charitable work go to <http://www.phoenixcoffee.com> or call (216) 522-9744.