

conscious business, but also another Co-op America member. I hope you will bring Dharma Merchant Services (866/615-5157, www.dharmamerchantservices.com) to the attention of *Real Money* readers.

Steve Hanrahan
Mirador Community Store
Portland, OR

Editor's Note: Steve, your e-mail just proves once again what a pleasure truly green companies are to do business with.

Find more responsible credit card processors in the "Credit Card Processing" category of our National Green Pages; free online at www.greenpages.org. Or, call 800/58-GREEN to get a paper copy for \$9.95 + shipping.

ISO a Green Engagement Ring

I'm looking for information about what my options are for making a thoughtful and ethical choice for my girlfriend's engagement ring. Which option is the best—buying Fair Trade diamonds (therefore letting my money speak for my wishes), buying Fair Trade sapphires, opals, or other gems (therefore not giving any money to the diamond trade), or buying an antique diamond ring and having it remade to fit her style (using a stone already out of the Earth and not asking for more mining to be done on my account)?

Getting married to us is about being in the world as a partnership, and to celebrate that, I would like to get her a ring. But I want one we can be proud of.

Denis Butkus
E-mail

Editor's Note: Congratulations on your engagement! As you noted, one of the biggest problems with diamonds and other gems are the social issues surrounding conventional mining practices—child and slave labor, below-subsistence wages for miners and polishers, and dangerous working conditions. Some diamonds come from countries where corrupt governments use profits from the diamond trade to support violent conflicts, as depicted in the film *Blood Diamond*. And mining operations can be devastating to the environment.

As the top-tier green option, we recommend buying a vintage or used ring, because no new precious metals or gems had to be mined to make it, saving resources and energy. There are specialty jewelers who can remake such a ring into a new design, if you wish. Check with your local jewelers, or try GreenKarat, 877/330-4605, www.greenkarat.com.

There are also companies that sell rings made out of recycled precious metals with used or responsibly mined gems, including GreenKarat and Sumiche, 541/896-9841, www.sumiche.com.

If you want a new ring, choose a green business that ensures that the gold and metals are responsibly mined. Try Columbia House/Trigem Designs (360/514-0569, www.fairtradegems.com), Igloo Diamonds (800/777-0889, www.diamonds.org), or any

of the other responsible jewelry companies that are members of our Green Business Network. To find them, check out our GreenPages.org Web site (select the "Jewelry" category).

Some green jewelers say their gems are fairly traded. There currently is no independent Fair Trade certification for gems, however, so you have to trust that these companies are practicing what they preach. With funding from the Tiffany & Co. Foundation, TransFair USA is now researching whether it's feasible to monitor mining operations and certify diamonds and other precious gems as Fair Trade—which would be a best option for new jewelry if it happened.

For more information on gold and diamonds/gems, you can read the following *Real Money* articles: "Gold Loses Some Glitter": www.coopamerica.org/pubs/realmoney/articles/gold.cfm; "Digging for Ethical Gems": www.coopamerica.org/pubs/realmoney/articles/ethicalgems.cfm.

If you're looking for ideas on planning a green wedding, be sure to check out our article, "Green Weddings and More," at www.coopamerica.org/pubs/realmoney/articles/celebrations.cfm.

More Options for Medicine Bottles

The May/June 2008 issue of *Real Money* had a letter to the editor about the prescription medicine bottles. My husband uses a mail-order prescription service, which sends bottles that hold a three-month supply of medication. Those bottles are recyclable, thank heavens.

I have found that non-chain pharmacies are agreeable to the idea of reusing medicine bottles. My local pharmacy will reuse my bottles at the time of refill, so I carry some old bottles in my car. When I need a prescription refilled, I take them in, wait the extra couple of minutes, and they give me my new batch of medicine in the old bottles.

It's worth asking around to find an independent pharmacy that will reuse your bottles.

Veronica H. Frast
Enon, OH

More Info on Forming Green Groups

This is in response to the letter from Elmer asking for help starting a green group, published in the May/June 2008 issue. The Green Team Project (www.greenteamproject.org) and the Low Carbon Lifestyle Program (<http://acterra.org/lowcarbondiet/index.html>) are good options for introducing community groups to green living. Green@Home (<http://acterra.org/greenathome/index.html>) is a good example of a team of local volunteers providing energy audits and conservation services. And the Northwest Earth Institute (www.nwei.org) offers discussion courses that are well-suited for small groups.

Kathryn Benedicto
Sunnyvale, CA