

## **Artisan-Made Designer Dog Collars are Alleviating Poverty in Kenya, One Bead at a Time**

*Handmade designer dog collars from Kenya let culturally conscious pet owners make an ethical, yet fashionable statement.*

**July 28, 2009** - [PRLog](#) -- In today's flooded pet supplies market, cheap mass-produced goods make up the bulk of purchases. The quality of most of these pet supplies is dubious, which is especially problematic when it comes to dog collars which need to be safe and durable. The workers who man the factories that produce these collars overseas are often paid extremely low wages. One Virginia woman thought it was time to break the cycle of cheap goods and cheap wages when it came to collaring her dogs. She went all the way to Africa to find a solution that would give dog owners a quality product, and give an impoverished people a chance at self-sufficiency.

Joan Shultz started the designer dog collar line "The Kenyan Collection" with her Kenyan partner Mercy Mahiani. The collars are made of premium leather and hand-cast brass buckles, but their most fetching feature is the beaded designs that adorn each one – no two are exactly alike, as they are all hand-made by local Kenyan artisans. Shultz started the business in an area of Kenya populated by the Maasai people. Most of them made less than \$1,000 per year, many less than a dollar a day. But since the business' inception in 2002, the ancient Kenyan art of beading combined with the modern American knack for dog accessorizing has proved a lucrative endeavor for these once impoverished artisans.

Dog Collar Boutique, an online store selling designer dog collars from all over the world, is pleased to announce the addition of The Kenyan Collection. As Schultz's company JMS Ventures only deals with creating and importing the collars, she needed to find like-minded American dealers to sell the collars on the retail market where they could be competitive with more "mainstream" pet supplies. Dog Collar Boutique has outperformed many similar specialty stores in just its first year online, and they hope that they can get the word out on The Kenyan Collection and other collars obtained through equitable, eco-friendly trading partnerships.

Shultz talks about how her collars fit into people's buying habits: "People are shopping according to their social values these days and want to know who made the product, and who gets paid. Our purchases can be a powerful way of saying who we are and what is important to us." In other words, we are starting to wonder who made the products we use, and we are more and more seeking products that were produced by someone making a fair wage.

The Kenyan Collection's aim should not be misconceived as charity or a hand-out. It is a fair trade agreement that gives the Maasai a chance at sustainable livelihoods, and access to a huge competitive market that they would otherwise not have access to, while allowing them to maintain their cultural identity. Schultz says of the money made from the work, "With those wages they want to put their children back in school, take care of family members; move to a better part of town – you know, the same things you and I like to do: make their own choices, feel independent and productive and able to contribute to their community." Maasai families have many of the same goals as American families, and The Kenyan Collection collars can help them achieve those goals, without relying on aid.

The beadwork on these dog collars is a testament to the talent of the Maasai artisans who made them.

Intricate designs and patterns in bright hues adorn collars of all sizes, in supple but durable black leather.

The beads are hand-sewn onto the collars and a leather backing covers the stitches so the beads cannot work loose. The customer chooses the size and color palette, available in everything from primary to earth tones to pinks, and receives a unique, handmade item for their dog. And since no two collars are exactly

the same, they'll know their pup is wearing a truly one-of-a-kind work of art.

These collars are so impressive, not only because of the quality and beauty of the product but because they are ethically produced -- something that is hard to find in retail products today. The Kenyan Collection was even chosen over hundreds of other collars to be included in the Obamas' gift basket, given to them after adopting their new puppy.

To order your own handmade collar visit Dog Collar boutique at <http://www.dogcollarsboutique.com/The-Kenyan-Collection-m...>

Both collars and leashes are available, in many colors and fitting any dog, from a toy to a large dog.

#### About Dog Collar Boutique

DogCollarsBoutique.com is the brainchild of Robert Taylor and Brian Lewis. Dogs play a large part in their lives and have been a wonderful source of love and companionship for them and their families. Their goal is to provide one place where you can find a large selection of beautiful, high quality dog collars and neckwear for your pets. The Kenyan Collection brand is just one of many lines they are starting to carry in order to offer the widest range of designer pet wear online.

To learn more about Dog Collar Boutique, visit <http://www.dogcollarsboutique.com/About-Us-sp-1.html>

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