



PRESS PHOTO/TERESA HERNANDEZ

Jeff Smith hands out pamphlets Friday in front of the Disney Store in Woodland Shopping Center Friday.

# TARGETING THE MOUSE

*Mall protesters accuse Disney of allegedly exploiting foreign workers*

The Grand Rapids Press

Garret Krul went to the Disney Store Friday afternoon looking for a pair of Winnie-the-Pooh earrings for his girlfriend.

What he got was a lesson in global economics instead.

The 15-year-old paused before heading into the child-filled din to read a flyer pointing out alleged abuses of Disney's offshore workers.

"It's pretty informative," he said. "It might change my shopping habits a little. I might try to think about it a little more than I otherwise would."

The leaflet, distributed by the Institute for Global Education, asked Disney to end its exploitation of workers in Haiti, Burma and Thailand by paying living

wages.

Jeff Smith said IGE chose one of the season's busiest shopping days to publicize a national letter-writing campaign slated to begin Dec. 7 encouraging consumers to ask Disney to clean up its foreign act.

"We'll be visiting several locations in the city that sell Disney garments or other products with the hopes of being able to pass out fliers that give (consumers) some basic information about the campaign," said Smith, an IGE director.

Six volunteers distributed about 400 fliers in front of the Woodland Shopping Center store before mall management asked them to leave.

Peter Cooper, general manager of Woodland, told the group they were on private property and the mall prohibits

handing out leaflets.

"People come here to enjoy," Cooper said. "We've got nothing against expressing an opinion in public."

Some shoppers weren't interested in IGE's message. One passerby told IGE member Frank Girard to get a job, while another said she didn't want to hear about worker conditions abroad.

Other shoppers, though, stopped to take a flier. After reading a leaflet, one woman told a friend about to walk into the Disney store to get out.

Kim Diephouse of Grand Rapids was shopping at the Disney Store with three nieces Friday when she heard the hubbub. She said the campaign might convince her to change her spending habits.

"If people are being taken advantage of, it could," she said.

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