

Atascadero residents Karen and Chuck Wyke have launched a business that sells peace symbols ready made to mount on bumpers and grills of vehicles. The couple said they hope their peace symbols serve as a reminder on a small scale to be a considerate driver and on a larger scale to consider and exhaust all available options to promote peace worldwide.

# Atascadero couple sells peace symbols worldwide

*Nancy Forrest*

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Atascadero resident Chuck Wyke and his wife, Karen, have launched Peace Wheels, a business that sells peace symbols ready-made to mount on bumpers and grills of vehicles and has been pleasantly surprised that the symbols are selling better than expected around the world.

The Wykes started their business nearly a year ago and, this month, launched the Web site, [www.peacewheels.com](http://www.peacewheels.com). They said they hope the chrome-plated peace symbols serve as a reminder for drivers, not only on a small scale to be more considerate while traveling on the road but also on a larger scale to fully consider and exhaust all available options to promote peace worldwide.

The couple produces chrome or black peace symbols that adorn their own vehicles as well as the vehicles of a burgeoning number of local residents.

The Wykes said they wanted to produce a product that would be made in the United States to ensure adherence to worker safety, human rights and environmental principles while, at the same time, keeping manufacturing jobs locally.

Paso Robles-based Make-It Manufacturing, Inc. manufactured the peace symbols, while manufacturers in Detroit and Wisconsin added the chrome accents and adhesive, Wyke said.

Wyke said the peace symbols, which sell on the Internet for \$15 each, could have been manufactured for one-third the cost had they been made overseas but noted that he and his wife were adamant that their business would operate entirely with American manufacturing and labor.

“We started this business because it was consistent with our overall philosophy of life,” Karen said. “We started the business last January but, since we’ve had the Web site, our peace symbols have begun to sell all over the world.”

The peace symbol originated among British protestors who were seeking nuclear disarmament in the late 1950s and, during the 1960s, peace activists took up the symbol as a rallying point during anti-war protests in Washington, D.C. and around the world, Karen said.

“Some people are surprised because they expect us to be hippies, but peace should not be a political issue,” she said. “We envisioned the peace symbol as a reminder for people to calm down, especially while they are driving in their cars, and take life easy, be at peace. I’ve placed one on the front of my car and one on the back. A friend of mine placed her peace symbol on her dashboard to remind her to be at peace.”

The couple said Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Buddha and Jesus Christ espoused principles of peace and non-violence, which they admire and seek to emulate. They noted that even the music of the 1960s kept the ideal of peace at the forefront of people’s minds, emphasizing that there is another way of doing things short of violence.

The Wykes said the peace symbol seems to resonate, particularly among young people, who have

responded to the peace symbols on their vehicles. When crossing the street, for example, young people often flash a peace sign in recognition of the coinciding symbol. The couple is tracking the numbers of sales in the United States and around the world and has colored flags designating them on a map. The map serves not only as a visual representation of the company's success but also as inspiration to continue the values and principles that the peace symbol represents.

The Wykes said they also see more high school and college students wearing peace symbols to school as part of a fashion statement and noted that even the popular advertising Web site, Craig's List, includes a peace symbol in its logo.

"It's kind of the signs of the time," Karen said. "All of the world religions say a great deal about peace and how important it is. It doesn't make sense if we don't fully consider peace and put it into action."

The Wykes said they have received positive feedback from shop owners, many of whom are their contemporaries, who sell the peace symbols.

Wyke said the peace symbols have sold in more than a dozen countries including France, Italy, Portugal, Ireland, Japan, Australia, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Canada and Israel. The couple has put several of the peace symbols up for sale on E-bay and an Israeli citizen won the most recent bid.

Ten percent of the proceeds from the sale of the peace symbols will benefit the Carter Center, founded by former President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalyn. The center provides assistance to developing nations around the world in an effort to eradicate malaria and other diseases and teach individuals how to become self-sufficient through agriculture. The center has the motto, "Waging peace throughout the world."

"We were impressed by what the Carter Center does around the world, whether it is installing sewer systems for sanitation or distributing protective nets to prevent malaria," Wyke said. "The center doesn't try to reinvent what another organization is doing. It helps support the existing program."

The Wykes have lived in Atascadero for 30 years. Wyke grew up in Orange County and graduated from high school in 1974, served four years in the United States Navy and has worked at Atascadero State Hospital where he has been the Chief engineer for since 2003. Karen grew up in Wisconsin and graduated from high school in 1974, and has taught yoga at Champions Gym since March.

For more information or to purchase a peace symbol, visit the Web site at [www.peacewheels.com](http://www.peacewheels.com). The symbols are also on sale at The Lavender Rose Garden, located at 9965 El Camino Real, and Angel Encounters, located at 7375 El Camino Real, in Atascadero, as well as the historic Halcyon Store, located at 936 Halcyon Road in Arroyo Grande.