

# 'Imagine what God might do ...'

Our \$10,000 Extreme Gift Department Makeover winner

By Andy Butcher

**R**ichard and Vanessa Yochim were thrilled to learn they had won *Inspirational Gift Trends'* \$10,000 Extreme Gift Department Makeover for their Heart & Home store in Arvada, Colo.

"It's going to be a great blessing," said Vanessa, who with her husband got into Christian retail initially through a homeschooling supply business run out of the basement of their home.

When space reached a premium they ventured into their first retail location, adding Christian products to their inventory. "It just seemed logical," she said. "A lot of our homeschooling folks were Christians who needed Bibles and other materials for their children."

Heart & Home moved into its current location in a neighborhood strip mall in July 2005, doubling its floor space to 2,100 square feet. To help draw additional traffic, the couple opened a contract postal unit in the store a year later.

Vanessa positioned her inspirational gifts by the postal unit because she thought they would be eye-catching to people "who might never consider stepping foot inside an ordinary Christian store."

## Strategic Locations

Gifts comprise about 20% of the store's inventory, with the rest made up of 30% homeschool materials, 40% books and 10% music.

The strategically located gifts section is "a great opportunity to share Jesus with these people," Vanessa said. "Imagine what God might do with a small gift with



**Top:** The gift department selected for our \$10,000 makeover; **Bottom left:** Store owners Richard and Vanessa Yochim; **Bottom right:** The Yochims' Heart & Home store in Arvada, Colo.

just the right Scripture verse for just the right person."

But the Yochims knew that they needed help in maximizing the potential and opportunity.

"We hope to expand the gift area," Vanessa said. "Right now it's just broken up into several little corners, and there really isn't any centrality or theme running through it."

Barney Paradise, president of store design firm Design Identity and one of the competition judges, and Dave Condiff, associate publisher of *Inspirational Gift Trends*, visited the Yochims in November to map out a proposed development plan for the store's gift department.

The \$10,000 prize includes Paradise's consultancy, fixture and fittings, decoration and product donated by sponsors Abbey Press, Carpentree, Christian Art Gifts, DaySpring, Dicksons, Kerusso, Lawson Falle, P. Graham Dunn and Universal Design.

Paradise said that while there were many worthy entries for the competition,



"it came down to where we could be most effective."

The Yochims had been "making efforts to really stay in the retail game. ... We felt with the right guidance we could really make a valued change there," he said

Condiff said there had been "many moving stories" among the competition entries. "What drew me to Heart & Home was how they were being innovative in finding ways to bring traffic into the store, other than just having a sign over the door.

"Christian retail stores need to think that way more and more—that it's not just about being a Bible bookstore like it was in the old days. There needs to be openness to shoring up the bottom line in other ways and developing potential new customers."

Heart & Home's makeover will be chronicled in a before-and-after photo report in a future issue of *Inspirational Gift Trends*. **IGT**