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Open for Business: Ruth's idea worked for teachers, so now there's a 4 Public Store

After 16 years of equipping Maine teachers with re-purposed stationery supplies, office furniture, art materials and books, Ruth's Reusable Resources has responded to the public's pleas to shop at the warehouse.



Ruth Libby, founder of Ruth's Reusable Resources, has opened up the 4 Public Store, allowing nonmembers to purchase from the surplus goods. It is located at the same site as the Ruth's warehouse: 39 Blueberry Road in Portland.

EDITOR'S NOTE

OPEN FOR BUSINESS tracks businesses, nonprofits and other entities that are opening, expanding or changing location in Greater Portland.

"We get a lot of calls from people or companies that are nonprofits and cannot shop in the teacher store," founder Ruth Libby said.

"We have a lot of product that either doesn't move in the teacher store or doesn't pertain to a classroom, or we have way too much of something."

Libby has created the new 4 Public Store, at the same location as the warehouse: 39 Blueberry Road in Portland. This new section will allow anyone, from artist to daycare providers or moms looking for a creative craft project, to purchase thousands of practical, unusual and ever-changing items that fill the warehouse. Proceeds from this new public store will go directly toward the resource center's operating costs and employee wages.

Ruth's Reusable Resources has been an economic alternative for many educators who frequent the teacher store to supplement their classrooms with basics – including paper, pens, pencils and rulers – to enhance their art projects. When customers leave, it's not unusual for them to walk out with new desk chairs, bookcases or file cabinets as well.

This school year alone, members have received more than \$3.2 million worth of supplies and furniture for a small yearly membership fee paid by each participating school or nonprofit. Through the spring, 4 Public Store will be open Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Libby plans to increase the hours of operation this summer.

Items are priced from one cent and up and include office supplies, scrapbook materials, furniture, household items, videos, computer parts and supplies and art and building materials.

Though the new store has just begun, Libby expects it will quickly take off and outgrow its present site. She said it may eventually move to a more spacious location with room for crafting and birthday parties.

For more information on Ruth's Reusable Resources, visit www.ruths.org.