

Roomy new home buoys nonprofit's business; A 27,000-square-foot location in Portland gives *Ruth's* space to spare for all of its school wares.

[ANNE GLEASON. Portland Press Herald.](#) Portland, Me.: [Jan 6, 2008.](#) pg. B.1

Abstract (Summary)

For a brief period, it looked as though *Ruth's Reusable Resources* was in danger of closing, as Libby and her board of directors had to come up with \$635,000 to buy the new location from Unum, which was a discount of more than \$1 million from the market price.

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Note: "Ruth's supplies our classrooms. It's a place for teachers to be creative - for us to come in and imagine the possibilities." Louise Caron Holy Cross teacher

Alice Souza, a librarian at Notre Dame de Lourdes School in Saco, made two trips to the new *Ruth's Reusable Resources* location before it opened, knowing full well that the store would be closed but wanting to check anyway.

The nonprofit moved to its new location, on Blueberry Road in Portland, in the fall, opening unofficially to teachers on Nov. 3. It held an open house for the public Saturday.

The new 27,000-square-foot store is nearly four times the size of *Ruth's* old Bessey School space in Scarborough.

At the old location, the organization had to lease 17 trailers for additional storage. Now the nonprofit has 20,000 square feet of storage, complete with three loading docks and three forklifts, said Tim Libby, husband of Ruth Libby, the founder of *Ruth's Reusable Resources*.

Ruth Libby started the nonprofit business in 1994, taking unwanted supplies from businesses and making them available to educators - charging only a nominal membership fee to keep the nonprofit running.

Since it opened, teachers across the state have picked up everything from three-ring binders to yarn to file cabinets at *Ruth's*, which operated at Bessey School for 13 years.

About a year and a half ago, Libby learned that the town-owned Bessey School would be turned into condominiums for seniors, so she went searching for a new location.

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With a \$235,000 grant from the Maine Department of Education, a \$5,000 grant from the Davenport Foundation, about \$60,000 in donations and a \$400,000 loan, Libby successfully secured the nonprofit's new space last summer.

Workers have been moving items to the new location ever since, and Ruth's held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday.

"It doesn't make sense to have a place like this close," Libby said, adding that when the old store closed, "we were getting inundated with calls: 'When are you going to open?'"

The Blueberry Road location is vastly different from the cramped Bessey School quarters, said Louise Caron, a teacher at Holy Cross in South Portland who has patronized Ruth's since 1994.

"At Bessey School, you needed to make sure you didn't have anything nice on because you'd have to do some digging," she said. "But oh, my gosh, the finds that you made in there made it worth it."

Browsing the books section Saturday, Souza said: "I'm never going to have to go into a store and buy items again. If it wasn't for (Ruth's), it would be coming out of our pockets."

About 7,500 teachers across the state have memberships with the nonprofit.

The number is growing constantly, and Libby said her ultimate goal is to open satellite locations in Maine.

The more immediate goal, however, is to raise \$1 million to pay off the nonprofit's \$415,000 mortgage and finance the maintenance of the new location.

For educators such as Caron and Souza, Ruth's Reusable Resources has provided a place to pick up everyday staples, such as paper and binders, as well as incentive gifts for students or quirky items to spark new projects.

Caron once picked up a batch of white plastic cases, which her students later decorated as Mother's Day gifts.

"Ruth's supplies our classrooms," Caron said. "It's a place for teachers to be creative - for us to come in and imagine the possibilities."

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