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Ruth's Reusable Resources is in the business of making "one man's trash another man's treasure," and helping local schools and [nonprofit organizations](#) at the same time.

The resource center offers office and school supplies to schools and nonprofit organizations for a minimum membership fee of \$350 annually, Ruth Libby, founder of the resource center said, providing teachers with weekly access to the store and items for free for 16 years now.



Caption: Courtesy Ruth Libby Ruth's Reusable Resources has a warehouse full of items that are free - except for a membership fee - to teachers and nonprofit groups.

For places like the Morrison Center, a nonprofit organization [offering](#) day programs for children and adults with physical and mental disabilities, this means they have been able to furnish and stock their new Scarborough home for the cost of a minimum membership. Since starting their membership July 1, 2008, the Morrison Center has benefited from \$52,030 in supplies, Libby said.

"(It is) saving us a ton of money," Kevin Kearns of the Seedlings adult day program at Morrison Center said.

"We've gotten every desk and table (from there). We never have to buy a colored magic marker, pencils, paper, books," Kearns' colleague Vicki Schaller said. "It's stuff that would normally get thrown away."

When Libby founded Ruth's Reusable Resources from her home's basement, that was the goal in mind - collect what others don't want so teachers and students don't find themselves in need.

"Teachers were sending home notes with our children asking us to save meat trays and egg cartons. Stuff they could use in the art rooms," Libby said.

So she started collecting things to send to school with her three children, and asking other people to collect items as well. When she heard of a similar operation in Auburn, she decided to tackle her own version for schools in southern Maine.

Since then, Ruth's Reusable Resources has gone from a basement into one room in a school, to their current warehouse of 28,000 square feet, 6,000 of which is filled with supplies for the 230 members of the resource center.

The supply shop, decorated with bright, primary colors, has wall-to-wall shelving of material and is a "kind of Marden's," Kearns said.

"If you see it today, take it, because it may not be there tomorrow," he said.

Libby said the stock is ever changing with nonprofits and school teachers coming in to pick up supplies and incoming donations daily.

"We're full of school supplies, office supplies, books, cloth, furniture, somewhat in the craft stuff," Libby said. "You'll find anything for on your desk, on the floor, on the walls or in your desk."

Besides the obvious function of some items teachers pick up, they are getting creative with them too. Libby said she's had teachers pick up slanted footstools covered in rug-type material and use them as felt boards for children. Other teachers have [used tables](#) for computer monitors as lap desks for small children.

"What is one thing for somebody else is turned around and used for something different," Libby said. "Reduce, reuse, recycle. People say they reduce and recycle, but they don't often do the one in the middle."

Nancy Freeman, a retired teacher and Ruth's Reusable Resources volunteer, said she always found something she could use in her classroom at the resource center.

"There's so much material you can get and for the teacher, it's free. That's a big plus right now," Freeman said, recalling that she used to make out-of-pocket purchases to enhance her classroom.

And just because the items are being "reused," doesn't mean sacrificing quality.

"The materials are in good shape and good quality," Kearns said. Often, the materials are even new. Libby said some of the donations she receives are overstocked items or discontinued merchandise that manufacturers donate. On Friday, she'll host her annual "Principals Only New Furniture Giveaway Day," offering a selection of brand-new office furniture to school principals. She said anything left over at the end of the day will be up for grabs to the rest of the members.

"I definitely encourage (schools to use Ruth's), especially given the way the economy is right now," Freeman said.

"With budget cuts recently, it's been very helpful," Kearns said.

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**TO REACH RUTH'S RUTH'S REUSABLE RESOURCES:**

39 Blueberry Road in Portland  
CALL 699-5565

Credit: By EMMA BOUTHILLETTE Staff Writer