



## Pawtucket

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# Muscles, more than money, handy at this store

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Cameron Fitzhugh works at the register and monitors the scales where supplies are priced at 40 cents a pound. Resources for Rhode Island Education is where teachers buy materials that manufacturers have diverted from the waste stream.

The Providence Journal / Sandor Bodo

PROVIDENCE — “Great teachers come here, because they really care about their classroom and their children,” says Pam Wamester.

Wamester, a retired teacher from Cranston, is greeting those shopping for school supplies in an old warehouse off Elmwood Avenue. Unlike a store with Office in its name, this one sells supplies by the pound. And its products are things that otherwise would have gone to a landfill.

Resources for Rhode Island Education, in the Hathaway Center at the end of Spooner Street, is the place to be this time of year.

Wamester, who taught in Pawtucket for 37 years, on Wednesday pointed out two great Pawtucket teachers: Brenda Warnock, kindergarten, and Lori Lancellotti, first grade. The two piled their plunder on a table before checking out.

Warnock had selected different colors of felt sheets, containers for small items children can sort and handle and cards that would eventually help children start recognizing words.

Lancellotti had snagged glossy card stock in white and spring colors and games that would become a lesson a math lesson.

“The stuff you get here is way cheaper than stores,” said Warnock, spying a stack of metallic gold cardboard perfect for making birthday crowns.

The warehouse has been an ace up teachers’ sleeves for almost 20 years.

Lancellotti and Warnock shop about once a month, and each spends at least \$100 of her own money each year. Their Parent Teacher Organization pays for their memberships, they said, which range from \$60 per person to \$365 for a district to share eight membership cards. Corporations can sponsor a school system for the district price, according to the warehouse’s website, <http://www.rrie.org/>.

Alfred Petrarca, of West Warwick, teaches U.S. history and economics at Medway High School in Massachusetts. He had already selected rolls of deep red and rich blue vinyl to cover his classroom walls. The colors will serve as a background for changing time lines of world wars, big business, and economics.

He also got a three-ring binder for each of his students. For 50 cents, the binders were disappearing fast.

The organization’s director, Robert A. De Robbio, said the binders are donated by Avery Dennison, the multinational company that makes them. If a retailer rejects a pallet of school supplies for something as small as one broken carton, De Robbio said, Avery saves the pallet for the warehouse to pick up.

Companies can claim, for tax purposes, their donations of overruns, seconds, misprints, outdated colors, bolt ends and sample books, he said.

Jean Fryburg, of Warwick, for example, needed game pieces for the students she will meet soon at Park View Middle School in Cranston. For one set of players, she selected bright gold finials that looked like brass drawer knobs, and for the other, soft cylinders punched out of velvet-topped foam, leftovers from packages in which golf balls nestle in individual compartments.

“You come here with an open mind and a big trunk,” said Melissa Denton, a Westerly Middle School teacher.

Lining a wall in the back are sturdy cardboard drums, about as big around as a large pizza and 18 inches high. They once held Crystal Light drink powder in bulk, but now they’re stimulating creative juices.

De Robbio said the zoo uses them for animal feed. Teachers like them as musical instruments, he said, turning one over and thumping its metal base.

They don’t call them drums for nothing.

## VIDEO

BY THE NUMBERS Filling minds with recycled trash

RRIE accepts clean materials from factories, packages them for sale to teachers and non-profits at 40 cents a pound. Here are some figures:

40

Companies donate regularly.

79

People shopped for their classrooms Wednesday.

619

Schools, churches, not-for-profit groups that pay up to \$60 per person per year for right to shop at RRIE.

476.80

Dollars spent annually, out-of-pocket, on average, nationwide by each teacher, according to the National Education Association.

300

Tons diverted from landfills last year by RRIE's efforts.

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