Donated materials a treasure trove for educators

Nonprofit sells goods cheaply that would otherwise end up in "waste stream"

By KAREN LEE ZINER
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PROVIDENCE — It is back-to-class time, and preshool teacher Suzanne Guslyn stocked up Saturday on recycled stuff at the Resources for Rhode Island Education, a nonprofit located in an old warehouse off Elmwood Avenue.

For 40 cents a pound, she and other educators and students scored donated, reusable materials that would otherwise end up in the landfill or somewhere else in the "waste stream."

The manufacturers' donations are a trove for the imagination: felt squares and high-end bed-linen remnants; printing cartridges and rolls of Mylar; books, beads and other bits and bobs. Binders, glue sticks. Last year's Nordstrom gift wrapping. Cigar boxes and seat-belt webbing.

"I got some cool rolls of cloth. Some great pictures to cut out and some great stickers," said Guslyn, who works at the TLC Day Care Center in Pawtucket. "I've been coming since they started this, 22 years ago." Guslyn also snagged a laminated "Forest Babies" poster, batteries, a shiny red box cover with a see-through celophane heart.

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Suzanne Guslyn
preshool teacher

The warehouse, in the Hathaway Building at the end of Spooner Street, is open all year. Individual memberships to RRIE — a nonprofit educational and environmental organization — cost $300; organizations and districts pay more. RRIE also offers innovative workshops.

Director Robert A. DeRobbio said manufacturers donate "when they've made too much of the product, or the color didn't come out right," or there are misprints, for instance. They receive tax deductions for the donated clean materials.

"Most of our members are schools in Rhode Island — public, private, home school associations, parish schools, students and teachers, colleges," DeRobbio said.

The RRIE [formerly Recycling for Education], started 22 years ago in space at the Verezie Street School. DeRobbio, then assistant superintendent of Providence schools, made the space available contingent upon Providence teachers getting "first dibs," he said.

The two former special-needs teachers who started it, Kathleen Samways and Priscilla Miller, "saw this [in part] as an opportunity to provide a work environment" for special-needs students and adults, who sort, bag and price items two days a week, DeRobbio said.

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Sarah Hesford
of North Kingstown, holds her daughter Rachel, 1, as she weighs items Saturday to use in her special education class at Charlevoix School. Behind the counter, left, is Katherine Silva, administrative assistant, at Resources for Rhode Island Education.

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Kim Chartier, a teacher at Pawtucket Elementary School, was pleased with her Saturday purchases. She brought ring-binders that students will use as "memory books," with pictures and writing they will take home at the end of the year.

Meghan Healy, a teacher at the Blackstone Academy Charter School in Cumberland, was buying chipboard and black vinyl. She generally visits every other week.

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Healy said she couldn't name her best find, "but the large paper is amazing. If you go to the art supply store, it's going to be way more expensive."

"it's very cost-efficient," she said. "It's hit or miss," but on Saturday, it appeared to be a hit.

For more information, go to the website www.rie.org.

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