

# Office castoffs go to classrooms

## TEACHERS GET FREE SUPPLIES

### Businesses save on garbage costs

BY AMY MAYER  
The New York Times

BOSTON — Matt Knapp, a middle-school history teacher, used to spend a lot of his own money on supplies for his classroom. Now, he goes to the warehouse-style shop of Extras for Creative Learning.

"I come here for the free loot," Knapp said. Extras for Creative Learning is a nonprofit organization that funnels castoff items from businesses into the hands of teachers, day-care providers and parents. The economic downturn is fueling a boom in some donations.

"We actually have been getting all kinds of office things from places that are either downsizing or moving to smaller offices," said Jodi Schmidt, the director of the group.

Knapp pays \$40 a year for eight visits to the warehouse, during which he can take as much as he wants. He usually stocks up on poster board and drawing paper, markers and pens, binders, and sometimes cups, fake coins and other props for skits in his classes at the Lilla G. Frederick Pilot Middle School in Boston.

COURTESY: THE CENTER



C. J. GUNTHER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

received items that would otherwise be destined for landfills or incinerators, allowing businesses a tax write-off.

The center, which has an annual budget of \$175,000, picks up donated items at no charge. To raise money, it sells new and used donated furniture, such as filing cabinets, tables, desks and chairs.

When Reebok moved a division to South Carolina from Canton, Mass., last spring, all the paper clips, in-

boxes and other supplies employees did not want were sent to Extras for Creative Learning, said Becky Snow, chairwoman of the Reebok Environmental Action Team.

The company also reduced its garbage cost by donating more obscure items. Heavy rolls of polyurethane film, most likely used to make prototypes of the cushioning mechanism in sneakers, turned out to be great for making music.

"Artists and school groups

Jodi Schmidt is director of Extras for Creative Learning, which provides donated office supplies to teachers.

have been using it for drums," Snow said.

Recycling for Rhode Island Education, in Providence, also redistributes corporate castoffs with an environmental angle, ensuring that materials are reused rather than trashed. The Kids in Need Network gives free school supplies to low-income students in 23 cities.

Extras for Creative Learning has nearly 1,000 members. Anyone can join, though rates are lowest for Boston public-school teach-

ers. The school district provides free space for the center in the basement of the Boston Latin Academy.

Since August 2008, the center's data show, the school district has received more than \$300,000 worth of supplies.

On a recent visit, SuTherriault, an education instructor at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, chose some short cardboard tubes, felt and paper for a pre-school project she coordinates.

Then an Extras for Creative Learning worker brought out the items she had called ahead for: 50 canvas tote bags so children could take materials home.

"I just saved \$693," Therriault said as she surveyed her items.

Along with the paper clips, paste and cardboard, there is the occasional must-have oddity such as the centrifuge donated by a science company.

"You can't pass up an opportunity like that," said Teresa Marx, a chemistry teacher at nearby Excel High School who saw the item listed on the center's blog and rushed over. "It was just too amazing."