

# TREASURES 4 TEACHERS HELPS ARIZONA EDUCATORS

BY RACHEL GOSSEN

Barbara Blalock looks happily upon the aisles filled with recycled office supplies at her warehouse, as educators search for materials they need for their classrooms. Once a project started in her garage seven years ago, now Blalock has grown her nonprofit, Treasures 4 Teachers, into a successful organization that aims to provide Arizona teachers with reused school supplies at little to no cost. For a low annual membership fee of \$35.00, anyone who works directly with students in an educational capacity has access to the “free zone,” \$5.00 bags full of supplies, other priced-as-marked items and die cut and laminating machines for use.

On average, Arizona teachers spend \$1,000.00 out of pocket annually on school supplies for their students. Upon learning this, Blalock began the challenge of creating Treasures 4 Teachers. “The idea came from finding out that teachers don’t have the supplies they need, but companies and businesses have an abundance of supplies that they don’t use,” she said.


Blalock first reached out to Intel, asking for any surplus office supplies. She quickly received shipments of various items that she would store in her garage and give to teachers. Soon, other corporations began doing the same, and Blalock’s garage began to overflow. In 2010, she relocated the project to a warehouse and officially became a registered nonprofit. By repurposing supplies that would otherwise be left in storage or thrown away, Treasures 4 Teachers to-date has saved 2.1 million cubic feet of waste from entering landfills.

Everything within the warehouse has been donated to Treasures 4 Teachers, including the shopping carts teachers use to gather items. Blalock, her staff and 50 Treasures 4 Teachers volunteers recently moved from a 4,000-square-foot space to a 12,000-square-foot warehouse in Tempe to accommodate the growing amount of donations.

Educators can find not only basic supplies, such as markers and binders, but also some recycled materials that have been turned into innovative kits by Blalock’s team. One example Blalock is very proud of is a wooden marker holder. “A screen door company was donating a bunch of wood to us. One of our volunteers made it into a rectangular shape, drilled holes in it, and now it can be a marker holder. So now,

what was once something that they didn’t know what to do with, is being used for the classroom,” she said. They also have DVD cases they have turned into personal dry-erase boards for students and iced tea bottles converted into colored pencil holders, with the sharpener glued to the bottle cap so it never gets lost.

Treasures 4 Teachers is about to get busy as the school season approaches, but Blalock is ready. A school supply drive by Progressive Insurance, as well as the donations she receives from several corporations, has the organization stocked. Blalock often finds that people want to help, but aren’t sure how. She suggests buying a membership for a teacher in need. While the \$35.00 fee isn’t a major hardship for most teachers, there are some first-year teachers who do need the help.

Blalock knows the organization will only grow from here. With word of mouth spreading the news of Treasures 4 Teachers among educators and a mobile program bringing supplies to teachers during the school year, Blalock is seeing an influx in both donations and memberships. The nonprofit currently has 3,000 members, which has resulted in 120,000 students impacted through the program. Treasures 4 Teachers has also expanded to Tucson through an affiliate program. Blalock hopes to someday have more affiliate locations around Arizona, and possibly even nationally. “The beauty of it is that you’re able to generate the donations within your own community,” she said. “The word spreads so quickly, and when people hear that they have a place to take their stuff that’s going into the hands of teachers and students in addition to preserving the environment, they’re like, ‘I’m in.’” 

For more information or to find out how you can get involved, visit [treasures4teachers.org](http://treasures4teachers.org).

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Photos by Mackenzie Cushine



Barbara Blalock, founder of Treasures 4 Teachers

