Salvaged goods will surprise at Resource Exchange in Kensington

At The Resource Exchange, a creative reuse center at 2nd Street and Cecil B. Moore, executive director Karyn Gerred has a warehouse where she can resell every recyclable good she can find.

“We’re not cherry-picking high-value items. We’re keeping usable materials out of the trash,” Gerred said. “People often ask, ‘What do you have? But it’s almost like, ‘What do we not have?’”

The Resource Exchange was founded in 2009 in the Navy Yard to preserve the dumpsters full of usable materials that were left behind by film productions working in that area. They opened up shop in Port Richmond a few years later, and this year moved to Kensington.

“We wanted to be the thrift store for doers, makers and creators,” Gerred said.

Offering high-quality items that are in better condition than what’s on sale at most Salvation Army locations, the Resource Exchange is loaded with items like classroom supplies for dollars apiece.

“It’s great for teachers, because their budgets are limited,” Gerred said. One drama teacher had even brought his students on field trips to the Resource Exchange to stock up on materials to create an entire stage set.

Resource Exchange staff still travel around the region looking for salvageable high-quality goods. Most of the “salvage” comes from film and theater sets that are being broken down when production ends.

“Supplies for film and theater used to all get thrown in a landfill,” Gerred explained. “Now they’re finding their way to us. Keeping the resources in circulation saves money.”

Sets are often built using a tropical wood, lauan, which is popular because it is cheap and knot-free, but the wood is often wasted.

Gerred, a UArts alumna, uses her connections to the arts industry to track when productions will be breaking down their sets.

“A lot of these things we pull out of the dumpsters ourselves,” Gerred said. “Sometimes we’ll just go down with a truck and take everything we can fit.”

Anything that they can’t sell, Gerred said, will get sent to Resolution Recovery recycling in Northeast Philadelphia.

Resource Exchange’s recycled goods include, to name a few: bundles of fabric ($1/pound), 50-cent acrylic paints, foamcore, posterboard, laminated maps, flag/holiday decorations, frames and lamps.

For more information visit ResourceExchange.org.