HELPING PEOPLE NOVEMBER 5, 2015

Giving back to children's education

HIGHLIGHTS

Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials provides free supplies for Miami-Dade County Public Schools teachers

The center has received almost universally positive feedback

Linda Lecht, president of the Education Fund, is photographed inside the Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials. The Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials is a non-profit organization that provides free supplies for Miami-Dade County Public Schools teachers. **CARL JUSTE** cjuste@miamiherald.com

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BY JOSEPH BUSATTO
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Out of the destruction from Hurricane Andrew 23 years ago came one of the most consistent philanthropic endeavors in South Florida.

Many were left without homes and schools were out of session post-Hurricane Andrew. People began to donate supplies from all over the country.

But the only problem was the distribution of all these supplies.

The solution was the Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials.

"This was a creative solution and helped the school district," said Linda Lecht, president of The Education Fund.

The center consists of hundreds of different types of materials in a warehouse setting. Miami-Dade County teachers may go on the website or call to request a visit. Once they arrive, they grab a shopping cart and a clipboard to write down everything they get. Each item is worth a certain amount of points. Teachers get up to 100 points to use freely around the warehouse and can volunteer to earn more points. And according to Lecht, the center's goal is to service 2,000 classrooms per year.

"From the traditional — paper, pens, pencils, novels and reference books — to the unusual such as wire, tubes, small pieces of things, fabrics, and now construction and garden materials, all of which are used for various classroom projects in social studies, science, language arts, visual arts, and more, The Education Fund picks it up, transports it to the warehouse, sorts and merchandises it, then collects feedback from teachers for constant improvement," said Cheryl Rees, Ocean Bank senior vice president and director of marketing.

Ocean Bank, which has sponsored the project since its inception, invested $2 million and generated $8 million dollars in supplies.

Lecht lauded Ocean Bank's dedication to this project through the years.

"How many companies are willing to commit for such a long period of time? You dont see that in the corporate community," she said.

More than 1.5 million students have benefitted from the Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials.

"Ocean Bank is so proud to be able to help fulfill the needs of teachers and students in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. We know that The Education Funds school-supply warehouse makes as much of a difference today as when it first started 23 years

ago," Rees said. "People don't realize just how small school supply budgets are. The Ocean Bank Center helps our students get the supplies they need for learning activities and it alleviates the impact on teachers. After all, it is about helping our children succeed."

Norma Consuegra, a former teacher and now a volunteer at the center, has been coming to the center for years.

"It is a godsend for the teachers... We put all the donations to good use... This is something that the teachers really, really need," Consuegra said.

Liviana de Morizi, a first grade teacher at Oak Grove Elementary in North Miami and first timer at the center, said, "I got a lot of stuff for my class. Of course I'll be back."

"I like it a lot," said Melena Borrero, an art teacher at Palm Lakes Elementary in Hialeah who has been visiting the center for 15 years. "I use different things for prizes for kids. I do a sort of treasure box. Its something I can do for the kids."

In addition, the center organizes specific days for art teachers every year. Ocean Bank hosts an exhibition for art students and their parents to display their art using materials in their lobby.

"I think its a really cool concept. It lets the community see what's being done with the materials and the generosity of all the contributors," Borrero said.

Former teacher and now volunteer Norma Consuegra shops for art supplies for Bent Tree Elementary at the Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials, a non-profit organization that provides free supplies for Miami-Dade County Public Schools teachers.
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Cheryl Rees, senior vice president and director of marketing of Ocean Bank, is photographed inside the Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials. The Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials is a non-profit organization that provides free supplies for Miami-Dade County Public Schools teachers. **CARL JUSTE** cjuste@miamiherald.com

Amelia Earhart second grade math teacher, Emiro Alvarez, shops for supplies at the Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials, a non-profit organization that provides free supplies for Miami-Dade County Public Schools teachers. **CARL JUSTE** cjuste@miamiherald.com

The warehouse is decorated with quotes of appreciation for teachers at the Ocean Bank Center for Educational Materials, a non-profit organization provides free supplies for Miami-Dade County Public Schools teachers. **CARL JUSTE** cjuste@miamiherald.com