

We Are Here Foundation is looking to donate office cubicles and furniture to schools and nonprofits



Tom Cleaver, founder of We Are Here Foundation, standing in a warehouse room full of office furniture in St. Clair Shores. Ray Skowronek--The Macomb Daily

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COMMENTS

Just ask Tom Cleaver of Sterling Heights, founder of the We Are Here Foundation. Thanks to some networking, his group has office furniture it is looking to donate to nonprofit groups and school districts in Macomb and Oakland counties.

As Cleaver explained, he started the WAHF nonprofit organization in 1998 as a means of cleaning up the polluted lakes and rivers in southeastern Michigan including the Clinton River. In the past 20 years the group's volunteers have removed almost 9 million pounds of debris.

Such news is worth sharing, right?

That's what Cleaver's late brother-in-law did while talking to a state manager for Staples during a business conference for the Michigan Business Professional's Association. As it turned out Staples was looking for a nonprofit organization to help the company find homes for office furniture it could no longer sell. Thanks to Cleaver's brother-in-law, the two partnered up and have been working together ever since.

"We met the good people at Staples about four years ago," said Cleaver. "Since then, we have probably given away more than \$400,000 worth of new furniture to non-profits and school districts. We're really trying to spread it around."

Throughout the year Staples locations in Ohio and Michigan keep stock of misfit merchandise. Products that are slightly damaged -- a chip on the corner of a desk or a dent in a filing cabinet -- along with items that are returned with no questions asked. These include collections of wood furniture designed for executive office suites to filing cabinets, hutches and chairs. They also collect used furniture and cubicles from customers who are tearing out the old to make room for the new -- that might otherwise end up in landfills.

All of this combined becomes donations to the WAHF.

"We recently distributed 2,400 desks to badly needed school districts through our redistribution program," Cleaver said. One of the schools as he recalls was Harper Woods Academy, where one of the teachers who got a new desk nearly started to cry. The one she was using was propped up with milk crates. They've also distributed their donations to schools in Pontiac, Romulus, St. Clair Shores and Mount Clemens, where the nonprofit is based.

The thing is, they still have furniture available.

"I hear teachers and superintendents say it all the time. 'Why are we are spending so much on office furniture when we can get it for free from the guy down the street?'"

But they never call.

School districts, nonprofit organizations and startups that need new office equipment and gently-used cubicles need to contact the WAHF.

"They can email cleave@aol.com or call the office at 586-463-9400," Cleaver said. "I need to know a wish list and as it comes in I'll spread it around so it's not going to just one school district. You know, give a little to everyone."