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Lake Elsinore resident adds designs to reusable totes

## LAKE ELSINORE: Woman on crusade against plastic shopping bags

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"Paper or plastic?" is not a question Monteil DuBuque wants to hear when she does her weekly grocery shopping.

The Lake Elsinore woman won't step foot into a store without her reusable bags, and she's on a campaign to make sure others follow her lead.

To that end, DuBuque has handed out almost 300 decorated bags to shoppers to encourage them to forgo using plastic.

DuBuque, 66, says she believes one reason more shoppers haven't switched to reusable bags is that people don't like to use bags from one store while shopping in another.

"I don't want to walk a bag with (another store's) logo into Wal-Mart. I figured a lot of women don't want to do that, either," DuBuque said. "Every bag that you buy has the store's logo on it. I think that's what's holding up a lot of women" from carrying reusable bags.

So DuBuque, a substitute teacher, has spent her summer decorating bags that she gives to others with hopes of encouraging shoppers to not only use them, but make more for themselves and friends.

"The whole purpose is to realize these are wonderful and you don't have to use plastic bags anymore," she said.

Bags come in various patterns, from flowers to balloons to peace signs to camouflage.

A lifelong artist, DuBuque's original effort was to paint over logos. When that proved to be too much work, she decided to buy material and iron it onto the bag.

She purchases material by the foot, cuts it, and, using an adhesive backing, irons the pattern over the center panel of the bags, covering the store logo.

Ironing takes all of about 2 seconds, she said.

"A lot of women think it's hard, and it's not," DuBuque said. "I'm trying to get these women to make some up for their friends and let's stop using plastic."

She hands out bags to shoppers at area stores. The only cost is a promise to use them for grocery shopping for at least four weeks.

DuBuque said she even has learned a little Spanish to offer bags to non-English speakers.

A teacher for 24 years, 14 in Lake Elsinore, DuBuque said she stopped using plastic bags about two years ago because of concerns about the environment.

She said innumerable plastic bags end up in landfills each year.

It is estimated that more than 500 billion plastic bags are used annually, according to the Web site [reusablebags.com](http://reusablebags.com).

"Going green is important," she said. "The factories that make all these millions of plastic bags ... are spewing out that nasty smoke. It's one of the elements of global warming."

Although the idea of changing her fellow shoppers' mind-set may be daunting to some, DuBuque said she's not intimidated.

"I'm only one person. (But) it has to start somewhere," DuBuque said.

One reusable bag, reinforced with heavy thread, can hold as much as a half dozen plastic bags could, she said.

DuBuque pays for the bags and material herself. In the end, they cost about \$2 each, she said.

The effort seems to be paying off. DuBuque said cashiers in the stores that she frequents tell her they see customers coming back with

the bags.

Readers who would like to get a bag or to learn how to make their own, can call DuBuque at 951-678-0778.

Call staff writer Craig Shultz at 951-676-4315, ext. 2625.