

# Broomfield Enterprise

## Broomfielder practicing blanket bipartisanship

By [Sally Bridges \(Contact\)](#)  
Sunday, December 28, 2008

One person's trash is Carlene Bratach's opportunity to make a difference.

She sees the grace of her life's abundance as a responsibility to give back. She sees a fragile environment as a place to protect. She sees the forgotten as people in need. She sees art in bottle caps and quilts in banners and plastic bags.

Bratach recycles everything. She collects milk caps and bottle tops from Broomfield's three Starbucks stores and gives them to the Children's Museum of Denver, where the kids use them as tires on miniature cars.

She collects empty bulk coffee bags from the same Starbucks stores to use as fabric. The shiny, durable silver bags can be patched. She envisions using the silver fabric to fashion astronaut costumes for her two young sons for Halloween. The shiny material is perfect for the costumes, but she's been unable to quell the overpowering coffee smell. Soaking the bags in an upstairs bathtub and even machine washing them has done little to diminish the smell.

She collects old clothes from friends and neighbors to donate to Denver's St. Francis Center, a men's homeless shelter. Images of the men, often wrapped in black plastic bags, haunted her.

"It was so hard to watch," Bratach said.

But those men wrapped in garbage bags provided the inspiration to turn trash into treasures that could help them stay dry. It was October, and the answer was everywhere she looked: Campaign signs.

After an election where politicians made green promise after green promise, Bratach marveled at all the campaign signs that would soon become election trash. What would happen to all those signs?

She knew, after working with the coffee bags, she could harvest the sturdy, two-ply plastic signs stretched tightly over metal frames. The rectangular plastic pieces could then be sewn together as a quilt creating a tarp-like blanket. The kind of blanket the homeless could wrap around themselves, or place on the ground -- protection from the wet. And no coffee odor.

"I mentioned my idea to a woman working at the homeless shelter," Bratach said. "'Oh my God,' she said. 'That would be so wonderful.'"

So Bratach started collecting the signs. She made calls. Alpine Waste & Recycling in Commerce City agreed to help.

"We thought it was a great idea," said Brent Hildebrand, vice president of Alpine Waste recycling.

The company could have sold the material for recycling, but instead put it aside for Bratach. Selling the signs to a third party wouldn't have made the company that much money, Hildebrand said. It just made more sense to just give her the signs, he said.

Bratach then collected about 300 never-been-used signs from the Broomfield Democrats. The unused signs were perfect, since they didn't need to be wiped down and cleaned before they could be used, Bratach said.

The quilts are without pattern or party preference. Democrats share seams with their Republican rivals.

Bratach, who loves to sew, considers sewing machines women's power tools. She's completed about 40 quilts so far and has enough material to sew another 100 or so, she said.

"This is mindless sewing," Bratach said of the fabric she doesn't need to pin together before sewing. "I'm like a man who likes racing cars. I like the hum (of the sewing machine.)

"I need my power tools."