

This MS kindergarten teacher gets down to business

Neil Luter Floyd, Special to Mississippi Clarion Ledger Published 5:00 a.m. CT Aug. 7, 2018



(Photo: Neil Luter Floyd/For Clarion Ledger)

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Kate Morris taught kindergarten for 25 years, always with the thought in the back of her mind of owning a children's bookstore.

On July 6 she opened Kate's Classroom, a store that sells supplies for teachers, children's books and toys and Mississippi-made gifts, at 624 Grant's Ferry Road in Flowood. The store is located next to Subway in The Market at Grant's Ferry Shopping Center.

"This has been a dream of mine," said Morris of Flowood, age 51. "I've always wanted since I was young to open a children's bookstore."

Morris, who most recently taught in Madison at Madison Station Elementary and Mannsdale Elementary and in Ridgeland at Ann Smith Elementary, said the idea of a store focusing on items needed for classrooms popped in her head one day when she was driving across the spillway at the reservoir.



Kate Morris of Flowood, left, owner of Kate's Classroom in Flowood, looks at merchandise with her sister, JoAnne Morris Braswell of Flowood. (Photo: Neil Luter Floyd/For Clarion Ledger)

"I started doing research about it," she said, noting that there is one other teacher supply store in the metro area and it is located in Ridgeland.

New to retail, Morris sought help from the [Mississippi Small Business Development Center at Hinds Community College in Pearl](#). She wrote a business plan complete with a budget and other details, presented it to a banker at BankPlus and received a loan from the bank, which is an authorized U.S. Small Business Administration lender.

"I also received an \$8,000 grant that BankPlus gives to people starting businesses," Morris said.

Morris took possession of the building and began renovation in May.

"The walls used to be painted purple from when Curves fitness used to be here," she said. "We painted the walls a light gray and took up the carpet."

Members of the Knights of Columbus at St. Paul's Catholic Church, led by Anthony Carpenter of Flowood, helped with renovation. "They built our counters, put up pegboard and installed the book shelves on the wall," she said.

The resulting store is inviting and welcoming with an area at the front where teachers and others can take a break.

"We provide complimentary coffee, lemonade and cookies," Morris said. "I wanted this to be comfortable so anyone could relax a moment."

For children, there is a play area with a loft and a reading space with a bench.

"We've had lots of grandparents come in looking for books for their grandchildren," Morris said. "They get real excited when they discover we've got books. What has also been exciting to me is when a kid will come in, grab a book and start reading. That's

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The store sells all sorts of merchandise teachers can use to give classrooms a happy, colorful look such as borders in various themes from waves to frogs that are for use on bulletin boards plus educational posters, nameplates and stickers. Also in the mix are skills books, educational games, stickers, notepads, plan books and more.



Kate Morris, owner of Kate's Classroom in Flowood, shows one of the popular posters the store stocks. (Photo: Nell Luter Floyd/For Clarion Ledger)

Numerous first-year teachers have found their way to the store because they needed help with their first classrooms, she said.

"I've helped them pick out things for their classroom," said Morris, who earned a bachelor's degree from Delta State University and master's degrees in social work and early education/special education from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Morris decided to stock some Mississippi-made gifts so teachers could buy a gift where they shopped for their classrooms and to broaden the store's appeal so that anyone would want to stop by.

Mississippi-made items include Doodle Bug notecards by Casey McClendon of Belzoni; Redleaf Pottery crafted by Rebecca Potter of Arcola, who is Morris' niece; T-shirts by Molly Jerome of Madison; artwork by Marion McKee of Brandon; Doe's Eat Place Seasonings from the restaurant in Greenville, and more.

The store will serve as a venue for book signings and other special events, Morris said. A signing for the book, "Monkey Island," by Leslie Miller of Rolling Fork with illustrations by Karen Miller of Flowood is scheduled on Sept. 29 from 10-11:30 a.m.

Also in the works are plans to offer science activities and other child-focused events in the small front room that is part of the store.

Teachers, members of the home-school community and others have embraced the store, Morris said.

The Market at Grant's Ferry, located at the corner of Lakeland Drive and Grant's Ferry Road, offers accessibility to Flowood and Brandon as well as Carthage, Pisgah and Pelahatchie, and that has proven helpful, Morris said.

Contact Nell Luter Floyd at nellfloyd@bellsouth.net.

If you go

What: Kate's Classroom

Where: 624 Grant's Ferry Road in Flowood.

Hours: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday through Friday; 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturday.

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