

A NEW CHAPTER



Visitors explore The Backyard Bookshelf, which was a vendor May 2 at the Flint Hills Festival in Manhattan.

Staff photos by Lewis Marien

Fort Riley woman says love of children's books led her to create mobile store

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A Fort Riley woman is writing a new chapter for herself by starting a mobile bookstore.

Kaitlynn Steen of Fort Riley, the owner of Backyard Bookshelf, said her business model is “not just books; it's things that make me laugh and bring me joy.”

Steen was among the vendors at the annual Flint Hills Fest on Saturday at Blue Earth Plaza.

“It started with my love of kids' books,” she said. “I think nowadays they make really beautiful children's books. And my kids are 9 and 7, and now there's also a huge trend with adult books being very decorative and very beautiful. And as an adult, I wanted to start reading again, and I wanted to kind of own something as a military spouse, which is hard to do when you're moving every two years. So this became a mobile thing that I could own and take with me.”

She said it has been fun to meet all the people who come out to see her store on wheels.

“I'm a seasoned pro now,” she said, laughing. “I've done it three whole times on base. We've gone to Abilene. Abilene just lost their little hometown bookstore. And we've gone to Topeka.”

She said part of the appeal for customers is exploring

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— Kaitlynn Steen

the trailer, lined with books and other merchandise and adorned with a “Bring books back” sign.

“Everybody's really excited about how cute the trailer is, which makes me very happy, but they're also excited because this brings books back into small communities that might have lost their brick-and-mortar bookstore, and it's more affordable to have a trailer than to pay your rent every month at an old brick-and-mortar bookstore that doesn't have a big town associated with it.”

Steen said she was grateful and thanked the public for supporting small businesses.

The Backyard Bookshelf is on Facebook and Instagram.



Kaitlynn Steen smiles as visitors to the Flint Hills Festival explore The Backyard Bookshelf.



Jillian Leigh Jacobs, left, and Jessica Lunt signed and sold copies of their latest books at The Backyard Bookshelf on May 2 during the Flint Hills Festival in Manhattan.



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