

Educational Dealer

June/July 2017

FOR PEOPLE WHO SELL TO TEACHERS, PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

Stocking Up for **Back to School**

**new
products**
page 26

**SUPPLIERS'
SPECIALS**
page 18

**what's
hot
now**
page 20



Learning Longhand Loops Back

by Tina Manzer

Good news for penmanship fans: “Handwriting instruction is returning to the classroom,” says Judi Rush, founder of School-Rite, a company that has helped kids learn to write for nearly 40 years. “Our method and templates have stood the test of time, and we look forward to serving future generations.”

The Common Core Standards do not include cursive instruction as a requirement, and in 2013, teachers declared handwriting obsolete; usurped by keyboarding. “Cursive writing is a traditional skill that has been replaced with technology,” proclaimed Fairfax Education Association President Michael Hairston, in the *Washington Post*.

But now the pendulum is swinging back, thanks to recent research in cognitive psychology and neuroscience. Last September, *Psychology Today* reported that handwriting supports children’s literacy and academic development. It also helps produce better writers and spellers, and it makes children – and adults – smarter, says an article by Dr. J. Richard Gentry.

“The future of handwriting, and cursive in particular, looks promising for a number of reasons,” said Judi, in a recent interview. “Studies show a definite correlation between the loss of cursive and a decline in creativity, concentration and memory retention. Several states have already legislated the teaching of cursive back into the classroom. Our products continue to be purchased by both teachers and parents, and are especially popular for homeschooling.”

We asked her to explain why School-Rite’s classic instruction templates are so effective. Here’s what we learned.

Educational Dealer: Do you notice people’s handwriting?

Judi Rush: I do, and I am embarrassed by my own. Good handwriting was the first to go when I became busy with School-Rite. Today, if I slow down, it comes back.

Handwriting is a brain function, and it requires patience and time to record thoughts by hand. Good handwriting always gets a good response – it can be quite beautiful when put down properly. My husband Ken’s signature is noteworthy. Every time I see him make his signature, I am reminded that it was the basis for developing School-Rite.

How so?

In 1977, Ken, with his perfect penmanship, felt our younger son could do better with his handwriting. We wondered if there was a tool or resource that could help him; something fun that he could use successfully on his own at home.

There wasn’t, and I got an idea for a template. While I finished college at Fresno State, I started cutting prototypes out of art board. To find out if my idea was sound, I spent many hours in the library becoming well-versed in the different learning modalities.

I was introduced to a school administrator who was doing work with

kinesthetic learners – those who learn best by touching and manipulating. She was an advocate for those learners, who were often overlooked in the education process. She trained teachers to recognize different learning styles and to adapt curriculum accordingly.

She tested my son, and we discovered he was a much stronger kinesthetic learner than an auditory or visual learner. With this new insight, we started developing our guides.

Who was your target audience?

The product was originally intended for home practice, but it quickly expanded to classroom use. We were also quite surprised to find that people in the fields of special needs, visual impairment, occupational therapy and homeschool also found our handwriting guides helpful. When we first introduced them at trade shows in 1978, people lined up outside our booth to see a demonstration.

(continued on page 45)

School-Rite offers 19 different templates like this.



We were the first to create a template designed for learning handwriting. It was not just an old idea in a different packaging. It was brand new and unique in every way. As the product became established, we had to work hard to protect our interest. Through it all we managed to survive.

Thousands of children grew up using School-Rite Handwriting Instruction Guides. To my knowledge, we are still the only ones producing this type of product. Classroom teachers love our guides and recommend them to parents for home practice.

Why was it so important to teach proper handwriting?

It was standard in every school curriculum. Neatness was stressed – teachers needed to be able to read what students had written in an essay or on a test in order to grade it; and students needed to take good, legible notes for themselves.

Today, it appears that writing and editing on a computer is easier for everybody. Learning how to interact with electronic devices took over in the educational arena as technology advanced, but now a generation of people can neither read nor write in cursive, and the negative impact is obvious.

What makes your handwriting guides so effective?

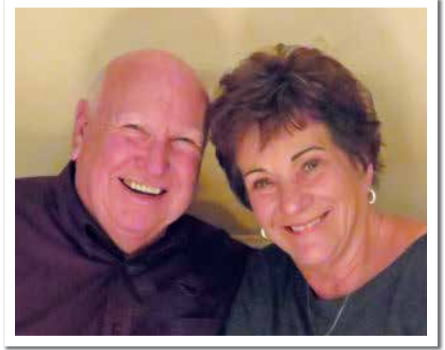
Well, at first teachers thought our

method was simple tracing, and they were skeptical. The transition from tracing an existing letter to making it on blank paper is hard for beginners as they have not yet developed the sense of motion of making a letter.

Our guides help them to feel the movement of making the letters. Made of high-quality pliable plastic, the guides have unique features that make the pencil lift where normal lift occurs in the handwriting sequence, allowing the pencil flow freely through each letter configuration. They also allow for pencil slant throughout the process.

The templates, 19 in all, that teach uppercase and lowercase letters for Zaner-Bloser-style manuscript, “transitional,” and cursive, plus numbers and shapes, help develop proper stroke direction, line placement and proportion. The repetition is a kinesthetic memory imprint, supported with the visual details on each guide.

Our main focus has been to provide a consistent quality product that addresses the basic skills associated with learning to write. The guides have always been manufactured in the United States and we are proud of that. We designed them in Chatham, New York and manufactured there for 30 years. With changes there, we moved our manufacturing to Arizona. We now distribute the products from our warehouse here in Fresno. Ken and I own a few “fam-



Ken and Judi Rush

ily-owned businesses,” and we work out of the same offices. We have always supported each other’s business and there is a lot of overlap.

How is your business different today compared to when it started?

In the 1970s, a women-owned business did not have much credibility, so getting started was a challenge. It was a lot of long hard work and the road was difficult. There were many obstacles to overcome and a lot of interest from large companies that concerned us. Moving School-Rite into the retail market was difficult, but paid off in the long run.

Today the business is established and accepted for the viable approach to learning that it provides. Teachers understand the product and welcome it in their classrooms. As cursive handwriting is reintroduced in classrooms, our Handwriting Guides are likely to be among the tools used for instruction. We have a strong brand with a solid product and reputation for excellence. We are excited about the changes in education and looking forward to providing for the needs of learners in the years to come. ■