



A Note of Inspiration

**by Nancy Elizabeth Goodman
photography by Beth Buckley**

Tay COSSAR MORGAN never dreamed people around the country would be filling their homes and offices with her colorful paintings. Every day, hundreds of people record their notes, grocery lists, and meetings under the gorgeous prints and inspirational words that fill the products of Tay Morgan Designs Inc.

In the fall of 2000, Tay, a mother of two, took a leap of faith and began the journey toward creating Tay Morgan Designs Inc. With her natural talent and a bachelor's degree from the University of Mississippi, she was in the perfect position to begin such a feat.

Painting came naturally to Tay and she began expressing her talent at a young age. "My maternal

grandmother was very artistic and creative. I grew up watching and imitating her, and so I feel I must accredit my skills to her." Tay continued to pursue her love of studio art at Jackson Preparatory School and then at the University of Mississippi.

After college, Tay worked in sales and sales management at a national telecommunications company for almost 13 years. During this time she occasionally painted canvases and furniture for the children of her friends. After her work caught the eyes of many, she was asked to paint 12 designs for an inspirational calendar for her children's school. "When the calendar was received very well, it got my wheels spinning," Tay says.



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Tay decided to take her ideas to the next level when she exhibited the calendar and other painted pieces at the annual Mississippi Wholesale Market in 2002. "The market allows both large businesses and businesses just starting out to participate," says Tay. "It allowed me to network, which really got my business on its way."

After realizing that selling her art could actually become a reality, she took the necessary steps to create the business that would spread quickly around Mississippi. So what began with a calendar evolved into more than a dozen products, all featuring Tay's original designs. The items include inspirational note cards, bookmarks, checkbook covers, note pads, address books, personalized stationery, thank you notes, Christmas cards, and annual wall and pocket calendars. Her newest items for 2007 include bridge score pads, magnets and babysitter pads. While all products prove to be profitable, the annual inspirational calendar remains the most popular item.

Tay's items are now sold in 400 retail stores in 21 states around the country. She contacts many of these stores at the Atlanta International Gift Market each year during January and July. In the past, Tay has exhibited at the Dallas Market Center and shown her work at the National Stationery Show in New York.

TAY'S PRIOR EXPERIENCE in sales helps her during market and in her day-to-day tasks. "Working in sales for so long really taught me the ins and outs of business," says Tay. "I'm driven to keep up with my customers with face-to-face contact, newsletters, follow-ups, and other necessary musts in the business world."

While her talent and managing skills provide the base of her company,



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it is the people surrounding Tay that keep her business alive. Two printing companies, Sourcelink of Madison and Quality Printing of Jackson, have been with Tay from the start. "I am always approached by overseas printers at market," explains Tay. "But I always tell them 'No, thanks' because I love keeping my business in Mississippi. Having local, reliable people who will always be there for me is very reassuring."

For the last four years, Jackson's annual Mistletoe Marketplace has done wonders for her business. "Mistletoe has been such a blessing, I love interacting with the customers who return to my booth year after year. Getting to have face-to-face contact with the very people who support me and letting them know how much I appreciate their business is really wonderful."

Besides her customers, Tay's family has proved to be a big support since she began her company. When Tay sits down during the summer to plan and paint her designs for the following year, she calls on her family for help. "Before I start painting, I call over my friends and family, and we talk for hours about new ideas and ways to be creative," says Tay. "They are a tremendous part of my business." This year, Tay's children, Meggie, 14, and Cossar, 11, contributed their time and artistic skills to the calendar.

Tay's design company has grown beyond her wildest dreams and she counts her blessings every day. While she continues to inspire others through her beautiful designs, Tay herself continues to be inspired by this verse: *Each one should use whatever gifts he has received to serve others* (1 Peter 4:10). "I think about this verse a lot in my business and daily life and try to live up to this the best way I know how," Tay says. Well, as long as Tay continues to utilize her God-given gift, we know she'll be around to serve others for a long time.

For more information on Tay Morgan Designs, Inc., log on to www.taymorgandesigns.com.

