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DUETTE FROM 1B

In 2009, Duette Elementary became a charter school operated by the Duette Education Foundation after Manatee School District officials decided that they could no longer afford to operate the school.

For several years, Donna King, who doubled as teacher and principal, drew no salary as she struggled to keep the doors open.

King, who has commuted 26 miles one-way from another East Manatee neighborhood to Duette for the past 19 years, will stay on as principal, but hopes to transition to more of a support role and focus on fundraising for the school.

"It's getting healthier," King said of Duette Elementary. "I hope it will become even more so as we are able to focus on other opportunities."

King has known Lester for years and recruited her for the job, impressed with her feelings for the community and certifications, which include elementary education K-6, reading endorsement K-12, ESOL K-12 and music



Brittany Cook, a third-grade student at Duette Elementary School, with teacher Donna King, as she completes a test in 2005. See a photo gallery at Bradenton.com. HERALD FILE PHOTO

education K-12. Her ESE K-12 certificate will be completed this summer.

Lester will be a school district employee. The foundation will reimburse the school district for Lester's salary, King said.

"I am very excited about the enrollment. With that increase, the school has an awesome chance to continue," Lester said Thursday afternoon.

"It's funny how your lifetime makes a circle," Lester

said of her time in Duette, to which she is returning after teaching elsewhere in Manatee and Pinellas counties.

She is married to Anthony Lester, who is employed at Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa.

Volunteer labor built Duette Elementary as a five-room school in 1930, combining three smaller rural schools: Albritton, Bunker Hill and Duette. The basics of the school's history are

captured on a historic plaque at the site. "The school once went to eight grades and had as many as 80 pupils," the plaque says.

The school is unique not only for serving several grades with one teacher, but its antique tongue-in-groove walls and ceilings, and polished wood floors.

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Duette school has 'a miracle'

By JAMES A. JONES JR.
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DUETTE — Things are looking up at Duette Elementary School, which has a new teacher and an enrollment of 18, the largest in years.

"It's a little miracle," said Duette resident Felicia Tappan.

Last school year, Duette Elementary ended with an enrollment of 10.

Moving behind the teacher's desk is Rebekah Lester, a resident of Parrish who brings a list of certifications that seem tailored for the school and a deep understanding of the community, which is home to Florida's last remaining one-teacher school.



Lester

The oldest of Lester's five children attended Duette Elementary and went on to be-

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