

## Comic store flees the Citadel Mall, finds a new home in Old Colorado City

-Guy Priel

After several break-ins, shoplifting incidents and shootings, Kathryn “Kat” Jones-Elstad and her husband Jeremy, decided it was time to leave the Citadel Mall on Colorado Springs’ East side and head west to Old Colorado City, opening KJ Comics & Marketplace at Red Rock Canyon Shopping Center, 3135 W. Colorado Avenue on Sept. 20, after six weeks of set-backs, including plumbing issues, painting and floor repairs that needed to be done in the former hardware store space.

“We tried to open on Aug. 1, but that didn’t happen,” she said. “We got tired of the mall and really wanted to expand the store. We gained 5,000 square feet in the move.”

Kat, Jeremy and their son Aiden started selling comic books at Colorado Springs Flea Market in 2017 before moving to the small space on the bottom floor of the Citadel Mall. They started looking for a place to move in March and originally looked at the store which formerly housed the Bookman, farther across the parking lot near Safeway and the new IHOP. The Bookman relocated in late 2018 to a location nearer downtown Colorado Springs.

“It was mainly a warehouse space,” Kat said, “But that works well for us, because we definitely wanted the space.”

The space has allowed them to expand beyond just selling comic books and collectibles, which is all they have had room for in the past. They have been able to add a coffee bar and a meeting space for things they have always wanted to do: host events, poker nights and karaoke. They have weekly karaoke on Friday and Saturday nights, which are billed as family friendly, because they don’t yet have a liquor license, although that is also in the plans for the future. Poker games, sponsored by the Pikes Peak Poker League, are held Sunday afternoons and Wednesday nights.

The coffee bar serves typical espresso drinks, coffee, tea, soft drinks and easy-to-prepare foods, such as pizza, nachos, hot dogs, chips and salsa, smoothies and hot cocoa. The meeting room hosts birthday parties, zombie festivals, arts festivals, craft shows and seminars.

“We have darts, pool tables and also show football games on our big screen TV,” Kat said. “As far as things we sell, there is nothing new. Everything we sell is vintage, from games to comics and figures.”

They sell action figures, Star Wars collectibles, comic books, and also consignment items spread out through the store’s front room and a recently opened area off the gathering room at the back. They are currently in the process of repainting the store in red and gray and the coffee bar was handmade and recently installed.

“In our previous location (at the mall), we couldn’t move and we couldn’t expand,” Kat said. “This new space allows us so much freedom and a much better environment for our customers. Here we can get a beer and wine license, which we hope to have by January. It is very expensive, so it takes time for that process.”

In addition to all the items for sale, they offer gift cards for people shopping for the “person who has everything.”

“We don’t do games, like Dungeons and Dragons and Pokemon,” Kat said. “Our goal has always been to keep our focus on retro and collectible items and games. We sell many back issues of hard-to-find comics.”

On weekends, they use the added event space to host a variety of events and are fairly busy on the weekends. Since opening in September, they have hosted four events. One event was the Zombie Crawl on Nov. 2, which allowed participants the chance to put on zombie make up and walk from the store to Old Colorado City. The overall goal was to create a hang-out spot for families wanting a change of pace, Kat said.

Many of their customers have embraced the move to the Westside and have made their way into the store to see the new space and residents of the West Side are embracing the chance to get together and play poker and enjoy karaoke in a family-friendly environment.

“It has been steady, but slow since we moved here,” Kat said. “Part of that is because it is winter and business is traditionally slow, but there is a lot of traffic in this parking lot, so it will pick up as time moves into the tourist season.” Once the weather warms, they are also planning outdoor activities.

“I think the new location will be great for us, because we can get involved in small business Saturday and other events in Old Colorado City and Manitou Springs, which we couldn’t when we were in the mall,” Kat said. “We have the best of both worlds now.”