

Sparkle-riffic**Hilliard teacher's alter ego is exploring new horizons**By [KEVIN CORVO](#)

When Debbie Taylor appeared on Wheel of Fortune seven years ago, host Pat Sajak described her as "effervescent."

It's a description a generation of Hilliard students would find apt.

Several years before her appearance on the TV game show, the former kindergarten teacher was reassigned to become the school district's "unified arts" teacher, teaching the subject at five different elementary schools.

Her brightly colored wardrobe, occasional costumes and acoustic guitar set Taylor apart from the average teacher. Eventually they inspired her niece and nephew to give her a new name that stuck: Mrs. Sparkles.

"It was definitely the clothes" that prompted the name, Taylor said.

Since taking on her new identity, Taylor has been busy.

Last year, with the assistance of a grant from the Hilliard Education Foundation, she issued a Kaleidoscope, a compact disc consisting of 17 children's songs.

She also appeared as Mrs. Sparkles with the Giggle Factory, a comedy troupe based at Hilliard Davidson High School.

Taylor has also been busy developing her own vernacular, including such terms as "sparkle-riffic," "sparkle-ize," "sparkle check" and "sparkle on."

Musical teacher

Long before she became Mrs. Sparkles, Taylor used an acoustic guitar as a learning aid for her students.

She began her career as a kindergarten teacher at J.W. Reason Elementary in 1973 after graduating from Dublin High School and Ashland College. After one year at J.W. Reason, she packed up her lesson plans and her guitar and began teaching kindergarten at Beacon Elementary School.

"I enjoy all kinds of music," said Taylor, but it was the folk-style music of the Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul and Mary she most often strummed for her kindergarten students.

"Kids like instruments. I saw the guitar as a valuable teaching tool," Taylor said. "I would come up with jingle or something to sing to teach kids about a letter of the alphabet."

After more than a decade of blending traditional classroom education with music, Taylor was named the district's "unified arts" instructor. She visited a different elementary school each day of the week, teaching four classes per day on a variety of subjects.

It was at these schools — Avery, Beacon, Britton, Ridgewood and Horizon — that the personality of Mrs. Sparkles began to materialize.

As Mrs. Sparkles, she picks a theme for each class, ranging from chlorophyll, the pigment that makes plants green, to learning to say "hello" in multiple languages.

The costumes and musical selections help children learn about the selected topic.

Taylor's classes, known as the "Mrs. Sparkles Kids Club," also focus on the general themes of self-esteem and compassion.

"I tell children true sparkles come from within and encourage them to sparkle-ize someone every day," Taylor said.

New ways to sparkle

In the future, Taylor would like to spread this message in a variety of media and even as a cartoon character.

She has written about a half-dozen short stories, of about 50 words each, called the Mrs. Sparkles' Easy Read Series.

She also published a coloring book including the words to the songs on Kaleidoscope. The coloring book and CD are sold as a package so children can follow along with the words and color the pictures as the music plays.

"It's a kind of karaoke coloring book," Taylor said.

A second CD is in the works, though without the assistance of a grant. Titled Pastels, the recording will feature lullabies rather than the high-spirited songs on Kaleidoscope.

Taylor also is working with an agent to book appearances at Children's Hospital in Columbus and another in Los Angeles.

As for becoming a cartoon character, Taylor said a producer of animated shows in Texas learned about her and asked her to prepare a script for consideration.

Taylor said she sees the animated Mrs. Sparkles as being similar to Glenda, the Good Witch of the North, from The Wizard of Oz.

Her husband would be Mr. Grumbles and modeled after her actual husband, Gary, who, she said, grumbles.

The Taylors' daughter, Stephanie, would be cast as Sprinkles and their son, Brian, as Sparky.

Taylor said she has wanted to be involved in a television show for children since she watched Lucy's Toy Shop as a child.

Mrs. Sparkles' CD and coloring book are available at the Web site mrssparkles.com or by writing to Mrs. Sparkles, P.O. Box 21734, Columbus 43221.



News photos by Dan Trittschuh
In between lessons about standard subjects, Hilliard teacher Debbie Taylor conveys a simple message about self-esteem and compassion.



News photos by Dan Trittschuh
Taylor, seen in the music room at her home, performs in classrooms and elsewhere as "Mrs. Sparkles." She recently released a CD and has another one in the works.



Taylor keeps this instruction booklet and hand-crafted doll, created by one of her young fans, in a keepsake box. The instructions tell "how to mak (sic) a Mrs. Sparkles."