

# Shopgirls

## NEW FM DEPARTMENT STORE A RELATIVELY UNKNOWN LUXURY TO NORTH TEXAS

By Stephen Webster  
Staff Writer

Susan Coats has come a long way just to open a department store.

Formerly a resident of South Carolina, Susan moved to Lufkin, Texas several years ago to manage a small store. Now a resident of Flower Mound, she is hard at work preparing for Belk's grand opening in the Town.

"Before I moved to Flower Mound, I couldn't imagine people not knowing what Belk is," said Susan. "But now that I've lived here a few weeks, I'm starting to get it?" People ask me, "What's a Belk?"

Ever to this reporter, "What's a Belk?" seems like a reasonable question. The answer, of course, is simpler than one may think.

Belk is a third-generation, family-owned chain of department stores. Primarily spread across the south-eastern United States, the company has been making a concerted effort to expand westward. Since opening the doors on their first store in North Carolina 119 years ago, corporate operations have been retained by the Belk family; most currently the three Belk brothers.

The new location in Flower Mound, just off FM 2499 near Target, is slated to be one of their largest stores. But a lot of work remains to be done before the highly sought-after retailer can open its doors.

"The best way to describe Belk is that we are a full-service department store," said Susan. "We do everything at all the registers throughout the store in the departments. Our associates in each individual area are specially trained to assist our customers in every way possible."

This emphasis on the word 'department' is more than just semantics. Belk features all the name-brands that one would expect to see in a department store, including Clinique, Estee Lauder, Ralph Lauren, Tommy, Calvin Klein, Tommy Bahama, and much more.

But their stock is not just in makeup, clothes, shoes and perfume. The rear portion of Belk's new store will house the Home products, such as specialized bedding lines, dishware, and other everyday solutions. Susan, along with assistant Tiffany Robins – who has moved from Oklahoma to McKinney, and now to North Texas on behalf of the company – has even planned out each season's new Home theme.

"It is probably more like a little Bed, Bath & Beyond but we go more into the decorative aspect," said Susan. "We even have fine jewelry. So diamonds, rubies, etc. it's all here!"

“We differentiate ourselves from other stores because we go to great lengths to train our associates on specialty brands and techniques,” said Pam Clark, Regional Vice President of Belk and Susan’s direct supervisor. “We should never encounter a situation where a customer leaves the store not feeling completely satisfied.”

“We will even feature alteration services,” added Susan. “Employees in the clothing departments will be trained on how to properly pin clothing for alterations, then we source the actual tailoring to local businesses here in town. They’ll pick it, take it to their shop, then bring it back in a day or two.”

But that is not the extent of Belk’s efforts to make new friends in Flower Mound and across North Texas.

“Aside from our amazing sales, which our customers just love, we’re working with about 30 charities in the area doing a special promotion that helps them raise money,” said Tiffany. “We give them tickets that they can sell for \$5 a piece. Then the group gets to keep all the profits from that. In turn, everybody who buys one of those tickets gets to take 20 percent off an entire day’s shopping, and they’ll get to come in and shop the store before anyone else does!”

Area charities working with Belk include Christian Community Action, the Young Men’s Christian Center, the Boy and Girl Scouts of America and the United Way and its associated non-profit agencies.

“We plan on having a kick-off breakfast for our charities on the 20<sup>th</sup> [of February],” added Tiffany. “That’s when we’ll be giving out tickets and talking to them about our special promotions. It definitely gives the community an opportunity to boost the charities and come see what we’re all about. And we do lots of things like this, such as school days, where any school employee gets a percentage off everything in the store.”

In addition to their community involvement, these avid shopgirls have some amazing sales planned for one day.

“When was the last time you saw all the major cosmetic lines feature a gift with purchase?” asked Kim. “That never happens, but we’re doing it for our grand opening.”

“We’ll also have lots of coupons of course,” added Susan. “Most of our specialized clothing lines will have selections on sale. For the most part, you will see more sale signs throughout the store than anything else.”

And, ladies, almost every pair of shoes in the store will be included in the sales – a fact that even Susan gets a little excited about.

“Oh, my God!” she said with a laugh. “The shoe department is going to be so fabulous! I can hardly believe it myself.”

Belk in Flower Mound opens on March 14.

“And we certainly hope to see you there!” added Susan with a grin.