

THE KEY TURNED INTO HER SIXTH-FLOOR apartment, first-year teacher Mallory Dittmore finally had her new place. The 15-minute drive from SM East was cut down to 11-minutes when she got the call that she could finally move in. The apartment building loaded with a rooftop pool and fire pit was her physical home. But the comfort she had already found at SM East through her semester of student teaching wasn't anything short of a home either – after all, home could be defined in many ways.

Dittmore spent her last semester of college as a student teacher for marketing teachers Amanda Doane and Mercedes Rasmussen. Rasmussen had been her professor at Rockhurst University and she always encouraged Dittmore to come student teach for her. With Rasmussen's experience in both the business and teaching departments, Dittmore figured she could learn tons at SM East.

"I gave my students an assignment during one of my first weeks of teaching. They had to create a T-shirt and their classmates would then vote on their favorites," Dittmore said. "I remember I was crying I was laughing so hard because one of the students put their classmate's face on the front and the back of his head on the back of the shirt – that was the day I was really like 'okay I want to be a teacher.'"

A text message buzzed the 'Kevin's Angels' group chat – the business teachers' text string – at the end of the school 2021 year. Doane picked up her phone to read that Dittmore had been given the teaching job. She would officially be joining the SM East business department in the fall.

"You get really close to your student teachers, but nobody as close as Miss Dittmore," Doane said. "The business department is so excited to have her and she just makes our family even closer."

Dittmore got settled within the walls of SM East by getting involved in coaching, finding the perfect pens to grade papers with and getting to know her students better with a question of the day each time she saw them. But her new apartment still wasn't ready.

She was greeted with a call from the new-build apartment complex -- the move-in day would be pushed back. And at first, she wasn't worried. But then they called again. And again. And again.

As Dittmore's four to five-day apartment delay turned into a potential three months, the hour-long commute from her parents' house in St. Joseph, Missouri became too difficult to do daily. From the questionable hotels she was offered by the apartment or the visa gift card that was supposed to cover partial living expenses somewhere else, Doane and Dittmore knew there had to be a better solution.

"Come live with me!" Doane said.

But Dittmore didn't want to intrude... "Seriously, come live with me, it would be so fun!"

The hour-long commute wouldn't be that bad.

"Please, I really don't mind, plus the kids would love it."

A month later, Dittmore unpacked her boxes into the Anthropologie, pink accented themed house and was welcomed by a doormat that said, 'Yay! You're here!' As if the Doane household didn't already feel like home, the vanilla bean Bath and Body Works candle in the bathroom sealed the deal.

"Aunt Mallory" was officially part of the family.

"Honestly it wasn't like a thing, it just felt normal" Doane said. "It was just like when a family member stays with you, or when your sister comes home."

Doane family dinners were the regular evening plans. Doane's sons Will and Grant would set the table and switch off nights on who got to ask Dittmore what she wanted to drink while Doane and her husband switched off nights of cooking. As dinner conversation finished – careful not to talk about school or teaching outside of the building – Dittmore was the first to get up and clear the table, making sure she contributed to her role in family dinner.

Dittmore woke up for her first real day of teaching and Doane was there to greet her with a packed lunch box and the car all ready to go. Doane's husband had set up his camera for the annual family first day of school picture, this time featuring their newest family member.

As the school year picked up through August, family walks around the neighborhood and trying to keep up with Doane's sons Pokémon games occupied Dittmore's afternoons. Family dinners continued and rides to school were still accompanied by her sister-like figure.

When Lancer Day finally rolled around on Sept. 9 Dittmore watched students deck themselves out in Columbia blue from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and while she channeled her Lancer spirit, however, she had even more to be excited about than the students.

Her apartment was finally ready.

After the pep rally in the Village Shops, Dittmore and Doane drove over to the apartment complex and finally got a hold of that shiny gold key. But it wasn't the key to her home, to Dittmore, she already had that – the friendship formed with Doane, the continuous teaching advice and support from Rasmussen and the community of SM East, that was her home. And she couldn't wait to see what the rest of the year brought – it was only her second official month.

AMANDA DOANE AND MALLORY
DITTMORE BECAME CLOSE
THROUGH STUDENT TEACHING

MARKETING TEACHERS

Mallory Dittmore Amanda Doane

