

Tinley business earns Rookie of the Year for franchise



The first year of business is always the hardest. And for Shalvi Khera and Sapna Budhiraja, their first year as owners of Young Rembrandts in Tinley Park came with double the challenge.

The duo decided to open not just one, but two locations to serve and provide art education to the youth of the Southwest Suburbs and Central Chicago.

Their tenacity, drive and success with both locations led to Khera and Budhiraja's locations being named Rookie of the Year for the Young Rembrandts franchise.

“There were a lot of people who started around the same time as us and we didn't even know that this award existed, for example,” Khera said. “They announced me [as the winner at the franchise conference] and I was just shocked and overwhelmed. It was a lot of emotions because it had only been one year. I think I was just overwhelmed.”

While neither owner has a formal art background, Khera said it is something she has always been interested in and something she felt she didn't receive enough education about growing up. So when her friend and fellow franchise owner mentioned the idea of Khera and Budhiraja opening their own locations, they jumped at the chance.

“The way art was being taught [when I was in school], it was a creative outlet to explore, but if someone doesn't know where to start exploring [that way of teaching] doesn't do any good for someone who isn't a left-brained person to start exploring,” Khera said. “The way this builds your basics and lets you experiment after you build your basics is what we're looking for and what's important in art. I think it's very important for all kids to explore their artistic side.”

While the pair have received nothing but praise from schools, administrators and parents in their first year of business, it wasn't without its struggles. Khera said they were basically starting from scratch, having no other locations in the area and having two very different areas to market in.

“It was a lot and there was a huge learning curve,” Khera said. “In terms of how the brand was met, everywhere we went the brand was loved by everybody. Even though there are many afterschool programs these days, there aren’t any that are about building those basic [art] skills in people. I think the educational side of the program is what a lot of principals and administrators said they liked and what they were wanting. The response from parents was amazing and we haven’t received any negative feedback from anybody in these one-and-a-half years.”

While the first year focused on establishing themselves in the community, Khera said there is still work to be done to ensure their program continues to grow into the future.

“We want to strengthen our existing business. We want to strengthen our teacher base, we want to strengthen the art that we get from the kids and make sure that we’re focusing on our kids and our staff,” she said. “We’re working on building what have and making it better.”