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**BUSINESS LEDGER**

The Business Resource for Suburban Chicago

CEO has lots of plans for Elgin-based  
'Young Rembrandts'



It's been 31 years since Bette Fetter turned the children's art classes she taught at her kitchen table into an international franchise, and the Elgin woman continues to be a caldron of business ideas.

Fetter, 65, is the founder and CEO of [Young Rembrandts](#), which teaches drawing to children ages 3½ to 12 in schools, park districts and libraries. The company is based in Elgin and has about 100 franchises in the United States, Canada, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

The business is expanding to China, and more franchises are in the works in South Asia, plus there is room to expand in North America, Fetter said. She plans to write more books -- her book "Being Visual: Raising a Generation of Innovative Thinkers" was published in 2012 -- do more speaking engagements about educating kids in visual arts and launch "a few products" she declined to give specifics about. She writes a blog at [bettefetter.com](#) and recorded a podcast until 2017.

"I'm that type of person," she said smiling, "always doing something."

The core belief of Young Rembrandts is that anybody can learn to draw, just like anybody can learn to do math, said Fetter, who has a bachelor's degree in visual arts and a master's degree in business. The company's YouTube video "[How to Draw a Butterfly](#)" got 8.3 million views.

"When it comes to art, most people think you've got it or you don't," she said. "We just believe that's completely wrong."

Case in point: ask children to draw a face and usually they come up with a circle with dots inside. But if you point out specific features like eyebrows, hair and teeth, they will produce a much more realistic drawing in as little as half an hour, she said.

Fetter said she started the business in 1988 and grew it with the help of her husband, Bill, and two of their children, Matt and Liz, who now work there. In the early 1990s, Fetter said, she was turned down by several male bankers for a \$10,000 line of credit she needed after taking on park districts as clients, which paid 60 days out. "I had one tell me I had to go home and take care of my kids," she recalled.

Eventually a female banker who worked for a bank committed to investing in small businesses gave her the OK, Fetter said. That same banker now has all the franchise business, she added.

While running the company, Fetter kept ownership of the McHenry and north Kane counties franchise territory until 2008. She bought it back in late December 2017 because she wanted a legacy for her kids, she said. The franchise since has grown from 314 students to more than 650 children enrolled each week, she said.

"I'm really honored to own the territory again," she said. "Our employees, our franchisees, my own family -- we are just so passionate about people and being able to get them to learn how to draw ... It just opens up the world for them."

Fetter's own learning curve hasn't peaked yet. Just last month, she and her son Matt took an oil painting class at Side Street Studio Arts in Elgin. "You can do art for a job," she said, "but you've got to do stuff for yourself."