



Denver Colors Confidence Through Community Art



In a world where pen and paper are being replaced with iPads and tablets, the demand for cultural enrichment and art programs are needed now more than ever. Fortunately, the Denver community has Michelle Brewer, owner of Young Rembrandts in Northwest Denver and Boulder, to make this a priority.

Young Rembrandts is a national leader in art education and offers programs for children starting as early as three and a half years to 12 years old. With a unique step-by-step process, Young Rembrandts' curriculum is based on the philosophy that "anyone can draw". The program uses simple shapes to break down complicated pieces, creating a masterpiece worthy of Rembrandt himself.

A mother of three, Michelle originally enrolled her son Gavin (11) and her oldest daughter Claire (8) in Young Rembrandts years ago. Every week, Gavin and Claire would return home with a colorful masterpiece and a huge smile on each of their faces, exuding confidence and enthusiasm. When the former owner of Young Rembrandts announced she would be selling the business, Michelle began to consider a career she never thought she would find herself in. After

mulling over the decision to take over the location, Michelle decided to take the entrepreneurial leap and invest in a brand that she felt passionate about.

Michelle worked for Home Depot for more than a decade before becoming the owner of Young Rembrandts. She served as a department manager for many years followed by a Human Resources role, where she managed more than 300 Home Depot employees' schedules.

Although Michelle's background from Home Depot didn't initially seem applicable with Young Rembrandts, she has been able to implement many of the managerial skills that she developed at Home Depot to run her new business.

"There is never going to be a 'right time' to start a business. When the opportunity to buy Young Rembrandts came to me, I was looking for a new career opportunity, but I also recently had a baby," said Michelle. "I knew it would be a challenge, but a rewarding one."

Buying a transfer territory provided Michelle a unique challenge as well. In many ways, it was a blessing – the former owner had already established relationships with many schools. However, it also meant that she would have to hit the ground running because it was a community staple that parents relied on.

Acquiring the business in February 2017 meant that Michelle was taking over in the middle of the winter session. This gave her the opportunity to dive deep into Young Rembrandts and its goal – to raise children's confidence and self esteem by giving them the tools they need to feel encouraged and inspired. Michelle knew that it would be a bit of a struggle running a business in a field she wasn't necessarily familiar with while taking care of a baby – in addition to her two other children- but finding the balance as a working mother served as a constant reminder of why she decided to embark on the Young Rembrandts journey in the first place – her love of children.

"The most rewarding part of my job is watching the kids grow and hear parents excitedly tell me how much of an impact Young Rembrandts has made on their children," said Michelle. "I remember this one little girl in particular who would never take her artwork home. Although the teachers constantly encouraged her to showcase her beautiful work, she felt too embarrassed to do so. Finally, one week when she was so proud of her drawing, she happily took her masterpiece home to her parents."

Michelle felt that story represented the epitome of the Young Rembrandts' mission. It wasn't so much about the artwork itself, but the fact that finally, a girl who had been ashamed of her work, felt confident that it was good enough to bring home to her parents. This proved that her self-esteem had grown leaps and bounds.

"The conversation is bigger than art itself," said Michelle. "We are providing children with tools to empower them – to show them they can do whatever they set their minds to by staying on task, remaining organized and following a process."

Since beginning to work with Young Rembrandts, Michelle has become a strong advocate of the importance of art, as well as after school programs for children. She believes after school programs are an essential part of a child's growth and provides them with an activity that makes them eager and motivated to go to school. After school art programs like Young Rembrandts provide a number of benefits for children, such as heightened social skills, safety and supervision, boosted confidence and a sense of belonging, amongst others.

Michelle is currently gearing up for the fall after school session. This fall, Young Rembrandts of Northwest Denver and Boulder is in 35 schools and 4 school districts, as well as a number of community centers. Michelle's oldest children, Gavin and Claire, will be taking Young Rembrandts classes, and Michelle is looking forward to the day when her youngest daughter, Maggie (3), is old enough join her siblings and experience the joy of drawing with Young Rembrandts.