

Young Rembrandts show power of drawing

By Brooke Robichaux



LAPLACE — River Parishes native Robin Corradi was transitioning from the U.S. Army and looking for her next opportunity when she found Young Rembrandts in May of 2013.

A recognized leader in arts education among children ages 3 to 12, Young Rembrandts was established 31 years ago in Chicago. Corradi was the first to bring the program to Louisiana, servicing the region from Houma to New Orleans East.

Debbie Stricks of LaPlace is the Young Rembrandts teacher for St. John the Baptist Parish schools. She currently teaches three classes: preschool and elementary classes at St. Joan of Arc Catholic School, and an elementary class at John L. Ory Magnet.

During weekly art classes, children follow guided steps to draw fun scenes and add a pop of color to make each piece uniquely their own. Along the way, children build confidence and gain skills that translate into success in the classroom.

Strengthened fine motor skills, social development, time management and attention to detail are only a few ways art proves powerful, according to Corradi.

“Our kids start with a blank piece of paper, and we guide them through their drawing,” Corradi said. “As we teach them to work through the step-by-step method, it helps them develop logical order processing. We like to say we teach them a right-brain activity using a left-brain method. They get very logical steps to come out with a very creative result.”

According to Corradi, Young Rembrandts is an opportunity for kids who are not in band or athletics to find their place in the afterschool community.



“The kids absolutely love the program,” Corradi said. “We have kids who will sign up for session after session. We have some that will start off very timid. In a matter of weeks, you can see their confidence build and see the difference in their drawing. That’s my favorite part and what the teachers seem to love the best, seeing that growth in a kid.”

Stricks was drawn to Young Rembrandts because of the manageable schedule, and she’s found a passion for working with the children.

“I’m retired and I enjoy working, but because I’m disabled, I can’t work a full-time job,” Stricks said. “When Robin approached me, I didn’t think I had enough skills to be a teacher. She saw something in me that I didn’t see. It’s such an easy program, and they teach us everything we need to know. It’s a lot of fun to see the kids get so excited.”

Stricks said the goal is to eventually get enough teachers to bring the program to all St. John Parish schools. The Young Rembrandts team gets permission from the principal to host weekly classes. According to Stricks, classes are set up to where a student who attends every session will never repeat a drawing.

John L. Ory Principal Monica Brown and Corradi attended school together in St. John Parish, where they were both part of gifted and talented classes. Artistic talents are now being cultivated in a new generation.



The Young Rembrandts program has been a success at John L. Ory in LaPlace. This week, Stricks introduced a drawing that incorporated a controller, a fireball flower, a turtle shell and mushroom from the Mario games. While following simple steps, students learned the definition of still life and how to differentiate elements in the foreground and the background. Students also receive monthly lessons on art history.

“Art is simple lines, curves and geometric shapes,” Stricks told the class. “Do you think you can do this?”

The children responded with a resounding, “Yes!”

While older children use sharpies, colored pencils and markers, the younger ones, such as the preschoolers at St. Joan of Arc, also use crayons. They all draw the same picture, yet each piece ends up having a personal touch.

Information about the low-cost classes can be found online at youngrembrandts.com.

Paid teacher positions are available for a small time commitment of one hour per class. For more information, email robin.corradi@youngrembrandts.com