

[Jennifer Krueger is sharing her passion for art and learning](#)



Jennifer Krueger, the founder of Estey Creations, is shown at her home. In the background are some of the pieces of art she has created and is selling to support scholarships for her after school art program and to help pay for the work she is doing with the Wallace McCain Institute.

Photo: Lori Gallagher/The Daily Gleaner

Do what you love could be Jennifer Krueger's personal motto.

The local artist has taken something she's always had a passion for and created her dream job, sharing art with students in grades 3 to 5.

Krueger is the founder of Estey Creations, an after school art program now entering its 11th year.

"I started out with an idea of what I thought children wanted to do [with art]. What kind of subject matter, what kind of techniques would interest students," she says. "I have a background in working with people from kindergarten through 90 years old, but I really am drawn most to the eight-, nine-, 10-year-olds, which is grades 3, 4, 5."

Krueger created an art-based curriculum she thought would inspire this age group and took her proposal to the school district. She got approval, but was told it was up to the individual principals whether they wanted to offer the program.

The first year, three schools said yes and the response from parents and participants was overwhelmingly positive.

"The level of emotional reward for what I was doing was profound and I knew that I had found what I should be doing," she says.

The after school program is now in three school districts province-wide, and this year they'll have approximately 40 schools and 16 artists that will teach the curriculum, says Krueger.

"And it's just as rewarding today as the day that I started."

Looking back, she says she can't remember a time when she didn't love art.

“My grandmother brought it to the surface at a very young age for me. She taught me a lot, and she inspired me and made it fun,” says Krueger. “To this day, I don’t know why I asked her so much to paint with me, if it’s because I loved to paint or if I loved her. At the end of the day, I loved them both.”

Her grandmother is always with her, she says.

“I carry her inspiration and how she made me feel into every art class I go into,” she says. “I’m never harsh and I’m never judgmental of the outcome. I want to bring to the surface what’s in others, like she did for me.”

Through Krueger is pleased with what she’s achieved, she would like to take Estey Creations further, to reach more people who need art in their lives.

About a year ago, she hit a plateau and knew she needed help, which she received from the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour and the Pond-Deshpande Centre at the University of

New Brunswick.

“There is a lot more that I want to do,” she says, noting this year has already been a big year for her in a number of ways.

For example, her family recently moved into a new home.

“My husband is not only supportive, but he’s incredibly talented and he built this home which includes an office space for me and a separate creative studio,” says Krueger.

As well, she’s hired someone to come into the business with her and she’s begun working with the Wallace McCain Institute. A long-time friend nominated her for WMI, knowing it would be a good fit as it helps establish a support network for entrepreneurs.

“It’s a spectacular program because it finds the people who would benefit the most from the program,” says Krueger. “I’m in the ninth group. There are 16 of us.”

It’s this huge time commitment, but they’re only two months in and she can already see the benefit of what WMI has to offer.

“Because I have this now attached to my name, I feel great responsibility to do something great and to be my best,” she says. “I feel a responsibility to be my best for myself, but also for anybody who has helped me along the way - and that’s been a lot of people. I feel very thankful for opportunities that I’ve had.”

She’s taken those opportunities and combined them with hard work to achieve her dream career.

The after school program for grades 3 to 5 is her flagship program. She’s currently creating more curriculum for other age groups, though the underlying message remains the same.

“Every artist is going to tell you a different way to do it and every way is OK. For me as an artist, I had my grandmother, and I also took art from other places,” she says.

Krueger took what she learned and created her own style.

“I want to be a piece of the puzzle for these young artists, but mostly I want to help them find their way and be inspiring to them,” she says. “And in a way it’s a very selfish job because they inspire me - big time.”

The after school program she offers if paid for by parents, as she has learned that free isn’t always better.

“There needs to be an investment. They need to want to be there, and then there is so much more we can do with them,” she says. “But having said that, I’m going into my 11th school year and I have never, ever turned a child away that couldn’t afford the program.”

How she determines that is by talking to school principals. If the principal deems a child a good candidate for the program, she will do what she can to ensure the child is sponsored.

“That money comes out of the bottom line for the most part. Every now or then somebody from the community will say, ‘We want to donate a couple sponsorships.’ Nothing has been long-term or consistent.

So what I decided to do a couple years ago was if someone wants to purchase an original piece [of art] that I have done, I will donate 30 per cent of that to the sponsorship program.”

In preparation for the new school year, Krueger has chosen five pieces of her art to sell, with 50 per cent going to sponsor children to take the after school program and the other 50 per cent going to cover costs associated with WMI.

“I’m hoping with these five piece in particular, they’ll find a home where someone can appreciate them for their art but also every time they look at them, know that they’ve helped their community - both in supporting me to be better to help the community indirectly through the Wallace McCain Institute, but also directly this coming school year, as it’s going to allow more students to take part in the sponsorship program,” she says.

As for where she’d like to take her company, that’s something she’ll continue to work through with the help of the WMI.

“I want to continue to be a teacher/inspirational artistic leader to many groups,” says Krueger. “I want to create artwork and do each piece better than the one before, to improve my skills and show my students that learning is never-ending.”

To learn more, visit www.esteycreations.com.