



# 7 Fine Arts

## Creating a Community of Artists

By Abby Montanez and Victoria Keenan

*"Treat everyone as if they were artists who just aren't trained yet."*

This is one of many lessons Sheri Alimonda, owner and founder of 7 Fine Arts, likes to pass onto her students, and something she expressed to us when we recently paid her studio a visit. Alimonda opened Hoboken's 7 Fine Arts just over a year ago as part of a passion project which combines her own artistic background with her love for working with kids. "This place was started because of the children. I, myself, have had a lot of experience with bullying and understand that everybody is different and unique. It's really important for me to share that with the kids. I like to say that what we do here is teach self-esteem through art."

7 Fine Arts was started out of Alimonda's dining room, where students of all ages would meet up after school to learn painting techniques and just hangout. When she found the right space, she packed up her supplies and old dining room table and moved it to the new studio. Bringing her own personal touches and a welcoming atmosphere, Alimonda makes sure her students know that the studio is a safe space. "Everything you see in here was picked out or designed by the kids. They wanted a popcorn machine, now we have one. They wanted it to be warm and cozy like my



home, that's why we have the couches. They're the ones creating the space; I'm just along for the ride," Alimonda explained. Most people, both children and adults, who take classes at the studio have no prior experience, yet by the end of their first session, students have created breathtaking works of art. The "Wall of Fame" as Alimonda likes to call it, features student artwork with their names and age, some as young as six years old.

Alimonda herself has been painting since she was 12 years old and studied at the Art School of Oil Painting, FIT and the Art Students League in NYC. While oil painting is her specialty, she frequently brings in artists trained in other genres for both her adult and younger students who are interested in exploring other art forms. With the exception of her oil painting classes, where students purchase their own box of supplies, most materials are fully provided, thanks to a personal collection Alimonda has gathered throughout the years. Students are

able to keep their specialty boxes at the studio, as well as upcoming pictures they plan to paint. "We don't group by age or by skill; how I group is where I know the child is going to exceed. Some children are better in a class of much older kids because they're going to be more calm. Some will excel in a class of younger children because that will force them to become leaders, while others simply need to come here for the social aspect."

For parents, it's becoming clearer that an appreciation for the arts is just as important as a love of sports or any other extra curricular activity, especially in places like Hudson County. Alimonda explained that when she moved to Hoboken with her two daughters, she really felt like the square-mile town gave her so much opportunity, and now, she wants to give back to the same neighborhood that made her feel so welcomed. To her, it's not just about the art, it's about creating a community of artists.