

## An ARTrageous experience awaits at The Main ARTerY

By Helen Wale Turner

A few months ago, artists Cathy Bennett and Aimee Summers were looking for an art studio for themselves and for teaching classes, and they found just the right spot at 202 N. Range Ave, Suite A, in the Denham Springs Antiques & Arts Village.

Both of the artists/business owners have been professional artists for several years; the two met when Bennett took one of Summers' workshops, and they just clicked. They also knew they wanted to be downtown because it was recently designated a cultural district.

"It's exciting to watch the appreciation of arts grow," Summers said, "and there's a great sense of community in the downtown district."

The Main ARTerY is a working studio rather than a storefront art gallery, although all the art hanging in the studio are original pieces and are for sale, tax-free. They don't rent display space; students may hang their art, and if it sells, they pay a commission. There's a three-month rotation so everyone gets the opportunity to hang their work.

While they are happy to sell some of their and their students' art, that is secondary to the actual painting and learning process.

"Our main thrust is teaching," Bennett said. "We give classes for beginners through advanced."

One-time group social classes have become very popular. Groups can book a four-hour "Vino Van Goghs" class, which is a textured abstract painting session set in a fun, laid back atmosphere. Attendees bring their own snacks and beverages, and everything else is provided. Bennett and Summers allow a little more flexibility in their version of this type of class.

"We don't specify that the class will paint flowers or fleur de lis," explained



Cathy Bennett and Aimee Summers and their students display and sell their works at The Main Artery. The artists show an impressionistic painting by one of their students of a person sitting. Appearing to peer over their shoulders is another distinctive original art work.

Summers. "Each person chooses their subject and color palette and leaves with a completely original work of art. We show them how to use tools other than just brushes to achieve texture and depth. We try to keep

the classes to 10 people or less because we give individual attention. Some of them have never touched a paint brush before, but it doesn't matter. Regardless of their skill level, we teach some basic techniques they

can take home and incorporate into their own style of painting."

Bennett said, "There's no set schedule for the Vino Van Goghs classes, and we can bring the party to your location. Call to book a party whether it is girls'/guys' night out, couples' date night, bachelor/bachelorette parties or family groups. All skill levels are accepted, day and evening classes are available, and reservations are required."

They recall helping arrange a surprise at one of the private classes. When a certain couple arrived, they separated the guy and girl and had each one work on something different. When the evening was done, he showed his painting to her which said, "Will you marry me?" She accepted, and a limo arrived to pick them up to go celebrate.

For more serious aspiring artists, the studio provides painting space and instruction, and students pay a flat monthly fee and bring their own supplies and come as often as they wish. A nine-hour ARTrageous Experience workshop is also offered, as well as other shorter workshops, including ARTrageous Kids for children.

Because it's not a store, they do not keep regular hours. A sign on the door gives their phone numbers, and since both live nearby they can usually come on short notice or will set an appointment to meet the caller. Call 225-788-8154 or 225-921-8047, see their website [vinovangoghs@gmail.com](mailto:vinovangoghs@gmail.com) or email [vinovangoghs@gmail.com](mailto:vinovangoghs@gmail.com) (both of those are ".co," not ".com"), or contact them through facebook.

Bennett and Summers purposely have a "casual, laid-back vibe" for all the classes as a way to encourage creativity, and their students appreciate the free-spirit atmosphere.

"We believe that everyone has their own inner artist, and we would like to invite you to our studio," they said. "Everyone comes in a student and leaves a friend."