

Creativity takes shape at ceramic studio

By Kate Sullivan Foley

Canton -

A recent rainy afternoon could easily have dampened the mood of some local girl scouts if not for quick thinking by their troop leaders.

First, the leaders canceled their planned outdoor games. Then, they made a last-ditch call to a local ceramics studio.

The response at Ceramics a` la Carte was just what troop leaders were hoping. The paint-your-own-pottery and custom design studio at Cobb Corner was open and could accommodate the girls.

Kelsey Trerice was very happy.

The 11-year-old Canton girl got to spend the afternoon doing something she loves— painting. She also got to make a beautiful Father’s Day mug for her dad. Trerice added a personal touch inside the mug she carefully stenciled and hand-painted.

“I wrote ‘love you,’” she said with a smile.

Many other children in the store that afternoon were making special gifts for their dads, granddads or teachers.

Meredith Hannigan, a Canton resident and one of the Girl Scout troop leaders, had her two daughters make a tray for their dad. With guided assistance from store staff, the girls painted their hands and pressed them onto the tray.

To finish up the one-of-a-kind gift, an artist from the store was set to hand-paint sports motifs around the edges of the tray.



By Jacob Belcher

Cathy Walsh, owner of Ceramics A La Carte in Canton, has a chat with Hailey Mackie, 6, who was having her birthday at the

“This is a great place for good gift ideas,” said Hannigan.

Cathy Walsh, owner of the store, said the store caters to all surrounding towns and beyond, noting service is a top priority.

“Everybody, adults and children, have a good experience here. We make everybody look good,” said Walsh.

Lauren Tourgee, the other Girl Scout troop leader, said they enjoy coming to Ceramics a` la Carte for many reasons. For one, she said the store is not just child friendly, but adult friendly and very art focused. Also, she said she likes the store’s high quality product as well as the staff’s hands-on guidance and support.

“They give a lot of tips and ideas. They empower the kids to try different things,” said Tourgee.

An Easton resident, Walsh opened Ceramics a` la Carte on Feb. 1. It is her second store. She opened her first in 1998, which bears the same name in her hometown at the D’Angelos Plaza.

Walsh had been a busy stay-at-home mom when she decided to embark on her own business.

Her concept was new and visionary.

She didn’t want just a place where kids came to paint ceramic pieces. Her plan was to create a non-threatening environment where anyone with any level of artistic talent could come and create something. She immediately saw the potential for her concept to include group parties. She marketed her store not only for children’s birthday parties, but also for bridal and baby showers, ladies nights, religious groups and team building office parties.

Her ideas have been successful.

Canton resident Kerri Irons was still glowing from her recent “Mom’s Night Out” at Ceramics a` la Carte.

Her husband had planned the craft night as a surprise for Irons. He arranged to have five of her girlfriends at the store when he dropped Irons off on a Friday night. Earlier in the day, he had dropped off a basket filled with wine and cheese for the ladies.

“It was fantastic. We all painted our own pottery and just had a great time chatting and really enjoying ourselves,” said Irons, who was back at the store

with her children on a recent afternoon to make Father's Day gifts and attend a birthday party.

Walsh said many groups host parties at the store, which can accommodate up to 32 customers.

"The set up here is so user friendly and it is always fun and relaxing," said Walsh.

The owner prides herself on her store's many unique qualities.

For one, the artwork on each piece is personally outlined in paint by an artist. When the piece is fired in the kiln, all of the customer's original work is maintained and not burned off.

Especially important, she said, is preserving the personal touches of a child, like a special drawing or their signature on the bottom of a piece.

"It doesn't matter how ornate the piece is, we do it all and we are very exact to detail," said Walsh.

Another aspect of her business that differentiates her from other craft stores is the product itself.

All of the items at Ceramics a` la Carte are lead-free, child safe and food safe. In fact, her store is one of only three in the country that test new glazes for manufacturers.

"We were selected because of the quality of our work and our level of expertise," said Walsh.

While preparing for another group to come in, Walsh excitedly talked about her summer art program. She has been hosting it for years in her Easton store and is looking forward to running it in Canton. Beginning the week of July 8th, the program offers children ages 7-14 a variety of art activities in a small group setting with specialized instruction. Each week, attendees complete 8-10 projects, including clay, mosaics, tie-dying and glass painting.

"We have about 300 projects in the pool of ideas, so if someone wants to come for more than one week, they won't be bored," said Walsh.

And attendees will be the first to try a new product line – silver clay.

"It is 99.9 percent silver and we will be making our own jewelry," explained Walsh.

The program is held Tuesdays through Fridays 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. and runs through the last week of August.

In addition to parties and the summer program, Ceramics a` la Carte is open for drop-in painters. Customers can choose ceramic pieces to paint at prices from \$4 - \$125. There is a \$6 per hour studio fee. Ceramics a` la Carte also sells a large variety of custom-made products, including family tree platters, house plates and signature plates. The store is located at 95 Washington Street in the Village Shoppes near The Canton Club entrance. The phone number is 781 828-6660.

To view some of the custom pieces available at Ceramics a la Carte, log onto the Web site at www.ceramicsalacarte.com.