

Lifelong passion plants seed for music studio

By GIA MILLER

In the fall of 2012, Bedford native Laura D'Amico opened Mustard Seed Music Studio in Katonah, providing voice and piano lessons to eight students, and teaching one Mommy & Me class for babies and parents.

Today, four years later, her studio has grown to include 63 students, with 10 on a waiting list. She has hired two additional teachers, and now offers Mommy & Me, a drop off class for toddlers, and an introductory music class for young children.

Ms. D'Amico has been on the path to becoming a music teacher since she was a girl. Listening to a song from the soundtrack of the film, "Little Women," at 8 years old had a big impact on her, she recalled. "Something about that song struck me," said Ms. D'Amico. "I thought, wow, this is powerful and I need to keep doing the things that make me feel this way. I knew then that I wanted to own my own studio and teach music."

By then her musical training was well on its way. She began studying piano at age 5, added the flute and singing, and picked up the guitar by the time she was 8.

Ms. D'Amico began to sing in multiple choirs, with voice as her main instrument. She advanced through every choir level, becoming the first person in Fox Lane's history to qualify for the National Association for Music Education's Eastern and All-National choirs. Ms. D'Amico went on to earn an undergraduate degree in voice performance from Houghton College and a master's degree in music and performance from The Hartt School of Music at the University of Hartford.

After college, she returned to the area, and began working as a private teacher at a local music school. She taught Baby Lap Time and Mother Goose at Katonah Village Library, something she still does today. An interaction at one of the programs she taught led her to start her own studio.

"One mom gave me the encouragement I needed to finally go out on my own," Ms. D'Amico explained. "She asked, 'I don't understand why you do all of these things for other people,



GIA MILLER PHOTO

Bedford native Laura D'Amico in the Mustard Seed Music Studio in Katonah

why don't you do something for yourself?' It was always part of the plan, but I was a new face in town and didn't think it was a possibility."

Ms. D'Amico identified a space above Van's Katonah Service Center where she could locate her new business and began Mustard Seed Music Studio. With a philosophy that music education should be fun, she works with each child to determine the learning method that works best, recognizing that children learn through play.

"I incorporate a lot of piano games, which is a way of teaching theory, rhythm or note values," she said. "Little do they know, they are learning from those games. I'm secretly adding theory, just like (author) Jessica Seinfeld whose cookbook secretly hides cauliflower in a cupcake."

A typical music lesson might include a wipe board, lollipops, rhythm sticks, a duet, or even a conversation about a student's wiggly tooth. The music teacher said that she develops an individualized approach for students, based on an understanding of what's important to the child, their likes and dislikes.

Parents credit her approach and personality as reasons they return, year after year. "Laura always greets them with open arms and a great big hug," said Dr. Seth Pearl, whose two daughters take piano lessons from Ms. D'Amico. "She listens, takes interest in her students and makes you feel

safe. Anyone can teach music, but she makes it enjoyable and comforting."

Her students agree. "She is really fun and she does lots of fun things with you," explained 8-year-old Olive Courter, who has taken lessons with Ms. D'Amico for four years. "She laughs a lot and makes a lot of jokes. She also plays games. I'm always really excited to go to my lessons."

Mustard Seed offers Mommy & Me classes for babies and their caregivers, and a drop-off program beginning at age 2.

"My 2-year-old is hard to entertain," said Gina Magill, whose daughter is enrolled in one of the Mommy & Me classes. "But with Laura, she is totally engaged the entire time. She is a genuine, kind person who loves kids and is passionate about what she does. The kids feel it and relate to her."

Last fall, Ms. D'Amico hired a second teacher, specializing in guitar. A voice and piano teacher recently joined the staff as well. Ms. D'Amico plans to offer group lessons for piano, guitar and voice. Also planned is a music lab, offering computers for students to play music-related games and compose music.

For information, call 870-4049 or visit mustardseedstudio.com.

Mustard Seed studio is located at 21 Valley Road, Katonah.

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— Gore Vidal

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