



# FRESH PAINT

Art matters to adults — many of whom are discovering the pleasures of painting for the first time...and making it part of their social life, too. Businesses are springing up to serve them.

By KIMBERLY WINTER STERN  
Special to The Star

**M**ichael Smith's apron is splattered and smeared with the colorful byproduct of his work.

Hovering above the table, deep in concentration, the pony-tailed James Beard award-winning chef makes additional tweaks to a labor of love.

Smith takes a couple of steps back and cocks his head. A few minutes later he resumes, making minor adjustments here and there.

He finishes with a flourish, wiping soiled hands on the neon orange apron, surveying the final product.

Thing is, Smith isn't in the commercial kitchen at

the eponymous Michael Smith restaurant in the Crossroads Arts District, preparing a dish for a customer. Or at his next-door tapas joint, Extra Virgin, pulling a pizza from the wood-fired oven.

And Smith isn't at home in Overland Park either, with wife Nancy and kids, fixing a family night taco dinner.

Today is Smith's day off from his fast-paced restaurants. Instead of creating at a stove, he's chilling out at well-known Leawood artist Robert Quackenbush's Studio Q, carefully applying various shades of ochre with a paintbrush to a heavily layered canvas.

Quackenbush, whose Monday and Wednesday art class business takes place in the lower level of his

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Enjoying a day off from his fast-paced restaurant business, celebrity chef Michael Smith finds relaxation in painting. Here he works on an abstract acrylic painting. At left is his wife, Nancy, who is also a member of the art class at Studio Q, one of the Johnson County businesses that's part of a growing trend of painting classes.



**Grapes and Paints was Johnson County's first socialize-and-paint business. Painting recently at the Overland Park business were Stephanie Lingle (left) of Lenexa and Cody Hoskins of Lee's Summit. Its owner opened the business to meet people after growing weary of the bar scene; Grapes and Paints now employs 10 artists. The artists act as motivational coaches and cheerleaders for the art-and-fun-seeking public.**



home, stops at Smith's station.

Hands shoved in his jeans, Quackenbush — whose permanently arched and furrowed eyebrows are almost as signature as his paintings and sculptures displayed in galleries around town — studies the chef's abstract design.

"I like what you have going on there," he said, leaning in close to the painting, examining its texture. "So what's on the menu for the wine dinner next week?"

Studio Q, now in its fifth year, is one of the Johnson County businesses ahead of a trend popping up in cities around the country: Adults taking up paint-

ing for enjoyment and enrichment — and socializing.

At sip-and-paint businesses like Pinot's Palette in Park Place and Thirsty Palette in Hawthorne Plaza customers drink wine, fruity cocktails and beer and munch on salty snacks and M&Ms while creating canvases in a group setting.

Grapes and Paints patrons bring their own bottles of wine and appetizers for a night of making art to Amy Pappas's brightly lit studio at 95th and Metcalf, located in a freestanding building in the Home Depot parking lot.

And then there's another type

of art appreciation happening over at Village Shalom in the Epsten Gallery. Executive Director/Curator Marcus Cain's ARTicipation, which recently received recognition as one of "America's 7 Best Aging Programs" in The Jewish Daily, helps seniors in their twilight years stimulate their brains through innovative multigenerational art therapy.

Participants in this art movement aren't necessarily professional artists — in fact, most are never-ers.

The common thread among these would-be Picassos is synonymous: channeling some un-

discovered or hibernating inner-creativity.

But the reasons for painting differ: Enjoyment, personal enrichment and therapy.

Meet some of the Johnson County business owners riding the wave of art instruction and helping people brush up on their creativity.

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Professional artist Kim Shockey stands between two easels in Grapes and Paints' communal painting room. Color-spattered palette balanced in one hand, brush poised in front of a half-finished painting, Shockey instructs tonight's

class.

"Use your brush like this to highlight the flower," said Shockey, demonstrating a swirl to the attentive 17 men and women.

The painting being executed tonight by each participant is titled "Blossom," a vibrant pink and purple calla lily. On the company's website, the project is described as "medium difficulty."

It's public night at Johnson County's first socialize-and-paint business, and owner/entrepreneur Amy Pappas is holding court as hostess. She opened the whimsically named





**"Most of these students don't know one another and aren't here to learn art," says Amy Pappas, owner of Grapes and Paints. "They're here to relax from their day jobs and do something different." Here she helps Jeff Greenapple of Lenexa.**



**Beer and art make for a relaxing combination for Grapes and Paints patrons such as Brandon Wismore of Overland Park.**



**Art, wine and socialization are a popular attraction for businesses such as Grapes and Paints in Overland Park.**

Grapes and Paints in June 2012 to meet people after growing weary of the bar scene and now employs 10 artists like Shockey who simultaneously function as motivational coaches and cheerleaders for the art-and-fun-seeking public.

"I knew there was another way to meet people," said Pappas, whose cozy studio is decorated with repurposed furniture from her retired father's chiropractic waiting room and items purchased at stores around town.

Pappas, a school psychologist in the Hickman Mills district by day, even toted the chic chandelier hanging in the lobby on a plane from Chicago back to Kansas City.

"I found it at Ikea and thought it was perfect for this environment," she said, pointing at the fixture that looks like a huge white puff dangling from the ceiling. "It's arty."

Pappas stands at the back of the painting room, arms crossed, smiling at the banter and camaraderie floating around the room.

"Most of these students don't know one another and aren't here to learn art," said Pappas. "They're here to relax from their day jobs and do something different. It's a little quiet tonight — the private parties get pretty loud."

Pappas said a group of six Children's Mercy physicians are regulars.

### **"I KNEW THERE WAS ANOTHER WAY TO MEET PEOPLE."**

Entrepreneur Amy Pappas, explaining why she opened Grapes and Paints

"They've been here six times," said Pappas, adding that the first thing the entourage of docs does when arriving for a two-hour class is change from scrubs into sweats.

Darlene Gatson is one of

Grapes and Paints' customers tonight. A second-timer, the insurance worker is perched in front of a tabletop canvas, an empty wine glass with visible lipstick residue to the side. Her large earrings sway as she moves her head from side-to-side, daintily dabbing paint squirted onto a paper plate and transferring it tentatively onto the canvas.

"Hmmm," Gatson squints at her painting-in-progress. "I think this will hang in my garage."

Next to Gatson is her daughter, hair stylist Parrish Adair, her left arm comfortably draped over the back of her mother's chair.

Adair, also experiencing her

second sip-and-paint night, moves the paintbrush clutched in her right hand over her interpretation of tonight's painting.

"No, Mom, I like it," Adair said, laughing.

Gatson's second daughter, Charnie, who also works in insurance, is enjoying her girls night out, chatting with two friends to her right.

"We're here to have fun and relax," she said. "It's not so much about the painting."

Across the table, Jerry Mansfield, a healthcare software designer, and his girlfriend Sarah Powell, a qualitative researcher for a pharmaceutical company, are joking with two women sitting next to them. A half-finished bottle of wine and plate of



They paint pictures — and they're in pictures, too. As this class at Pinot's Palette in Leawood keeps art students busy, instructor Rachael Wenzel (right) takes pictures that are immediately uploaded to Facebook. Opened on April 10, Pinot's Palette is Johnson County's newest painting party business.

The fun and frivolity had Juliet Ryan of Kansas City (below) laughing at a recent class at Pinot's Palette in Leawood.



nibbled hors d'oeuvres sits between them.

"I'm known as the heckler tonight," said Mansfield.

Best friends Natalie McGrath, a legal secretary with wildly spiked blond and brown hair peppered with purple streaks, and Sue Chambers, a city building inspector, sip homemade Mojitos and nosh on cheese and crackers.

"Nat, I think you could definitely sell this in a garage sale," she good-naturedly chided her friend.

Shockey fires up the blow dryer and circulates the room, drying canvases so everyone

can continue painting "Blossom."

At the end of the night, Pappas herds the painters into the lobby for a group photo.

The 17 Blossom canvases look uniform and neat. People depart, obviously pleased with their work and joking with newfound friends.

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Over in tony Park Place, Pinot's Palette co-owners and mother-daughter duo Deb Nemec and Kelly Flowers prepare for tonight's sold-out schedule of painting parties. They're checking the guest list and last-minute details; organization,

they stress, is important to success.

"People come here for a seamless experience," Nemec said.

Billed as a "Paint. Drink. Have Fun." destination, the 2,200-square-foot, sleekly appointed space is divided into a main room with space for 42 people. A private room that accommodates 25 is splashed with a mural depicting Kansas City jazz history.

Pinot's Palette opened on April 10 and is Johnson County's newest painting party business. Nemec and Flowers found the Houston-based franchise



therapist and president of the Kansas Art Therapy Association, leads a Friday morning art therapy workshop at Village Shalom. A large table littered with art supplies and paper is in the center of the room. Sitting around the table are a handful of Village Shalom residents, intently working on personal projects.

She pauses by a senior in a wheelchair, giving gentle guidance.

"Lovely," she said. "Really lovely."

The classes, once held in a room within the facility, are now in Epsten Gallery as part of ARTicipation: Pop-up Studio, a pilot-turned-permanent-program.

Epsten Gallery Executive Director/Curator Marcus Cain, joining the group this morning, had the vision of using the formal gallery space as a blank canvas for community art experiences in 2009.

"In 2010 I experimented with the concept by bringing in an Israeli artist who taught instrument-making based on descriptions from the Bible," said Cain. "It achieved my goal of giving people an immediate, interactive experience in a gallery setting."

ARTicipation challenges an art gallery's viewing space, transforming it into a creating space. The gallery is unique because of its location inside Village Shalom, a senior living community that includes assisted and skilled nursing care.

It's not a typical place for viewing art — or creating it, either.

Cain officially launched ARTicipation in January 2012 as a five-week program. He collaborates with arts and therapy communities like the Kansas Art Therapy Association.

"Epsten Gallery is for the entire community, regardless of age, religion or ethnicity, and



COURTESY EG SCHEMPF KANSAS CITY JEWISH MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART.

**"ARTicipation: Pop Up Studio 2012" at the Epsten Gallery at Village Shalom is a program of the Kansas City Jewish Museum of Contemporary Art. Executive Director/Curator and artist Marcus Cain and art therapist Sherri Jacobs assisted residents at Village Shalom recently.**

includes the residents here, too," he said. "Our focus is traditional and contemporary art with a strong commitment to intergenerational and multicultural learning, enrichment and therapy."

During its first year ARTicipation served more than 1,200 people, including the Friday morning art therapy sessions.

"It demonstrates how successfully arts-related health and well-being programs for those living in continuum-of-care environments like Village Shalom can serve as an integral part of a whole community's development," Cain said. "And how diverse ages can work together."

ARTicipation's success inspired Cain to design a more ambitious calendar for 2013.

Now in its second year of fostering a community art experience, ARTicipation blends

equal parts creative workshops, application of art-and therapy-based ideas and practices and exploration through classes and exhibits.

Objects created during ARTicipation are often part of a display of artwork created by Village Shalom residents, staff, walk-in participants and even groups visiting the gallery.

"It's a little edgy," Jacobs said. "To make art in this beautiful space that people are used to just viewing art in is pushing the limits of what a gallery can do. Marcus has made Epsten a vibrant working classroom where people see their art placed when it's completed."

Jacobs said the art therapy aspect of ARTicipation is vital for Village Shalom residents.

"Sometimes participating in a Friday morning class like this gives people purpose," said Ja-

cobs. "It can be that simple — and important."

Cain agrees with Jacobs on programs like ARTicipation and their deeper meaning and impact on people.

"Epsten is the people's gallery," she said. "It's a wonderful thing."

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Robert Quackenbush's merry band of Studio Q'ers is in hour two of the weekly Monday painting session.

The room is filled with a Zen vibe as two dogs roam throughout the studio/library space and his wife, Merry, an arts advocate, enters to greet everyone.

Joining Michael Smith and wife Nancy in Quackenbush's eclectic studio are Lori Keenan, Kate Faerber, Ginger Lunt, Megan Sutherland and Anne Weltner. Regular attendee Nan-

cy Beaver is off in the south of France for a week, painting.

Lunt, who had never painted until she joined Studio Q four and a half years ago, stands in front of an easel holding a canvas with a brilliantly hued owl, fine-tuning, consulting with Quackenbush.

"These really make the owl jump from the canvas now," said Quackenbush, pointing at the evergreen boughs in the painting's background. "That was a terrific addition."

The stocky artist moves to Lunt's painting neighbor, Sutherland, who started attending Studio Q nearly two years ago. She's taken workshops and classes in the past, but never any formal art training. Today Sutherland's project is a profile of her 24-year-old son, whose image is on an iPad propped by the canvas.



“Good,” said Quackenbush, who continues strolling around the room, offering constructive criticism and words of encouragement and impromptu challenges.

He stops at Weltner’s easel where she is multi-tasking, finishing a small pear still-life started at the beginning of today’s class and continuing work on a flag that has a Ralph Lauren flair.

Weltner, who has a degree in graphic design, wears her Studio Q apron over a long, white-collared shirt and moves easily between the projects.

“I didn’t know where this flag would go,” admitted Weltner, nodding to a similar image on a canvas resting against the wall. “I did this one for a themed party my daughter had. Now I’ll have a pair.”

Across the room, Faerber, who also holds a graphic design degree, works on a painting of delicate lilacs. Next to her Keenan, one of the first members of Studio Q, who has a degree in illustration and worked at Hallmark before leaving to raise a family, applies paint to a large painting of a vase of flowers.

Quackenbush’s studio is filled with sayings posted on the wall, objects of interest and inspiration and projects in different stages of completion. Large metal sculptures rest on a plywood table near a bank of windows where light streams in, illuminating the basement for the studious painters.

His philosophy of learning and teaching art is bold.

“Don’t be attached to anything you create — you can always edit,” he said. “Nothing is so precious that you can’t change it.”

“He meets all of us where we’re at in our journey,” said Lunt, who has had several shows of her work since starting Studio Q.

Quackenbush is a well-

rounded, award-winning artist, appearing in juried shows and invitations; myriad gallery, museum and corporate exhibitions around the country; and staging one-man shows.

“I want people to come here and let their imagination run wild,” Quackenbush said matter of factly about his avant-garde laboratory, “regardless if they are novices or are art-educated. I learned a long time ago that real painters paint for themselves and not other people.”

Quackenbush pours another cup of coffee into a blue-and-white porcelain mug and settles into a cushy leather chair, watching the Q’ers do their thing.



**At the eclectic Studio Q, above, instructor Robert Quackenbush and his students discuss an acrylic by Michael Smith. Quackenbush’s advice about learning to paint: “Nothing is so precious that you can’t change it.”**

**Megan Sutherland works on an oil portrait of her son, Beau.**