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RETAIL

ARTICHOKE COMMUNITY MUSIC | BY MARTHA SPIZZIRI

BUILDING COMMUNITY

From the start, Artichoke Music was a little different. When Judith Cooke opened the tiny storefront in 1971, she focused on creating a sense of community, hosting song circles and jam sessions. The next owner, Steve Einhorn, expanded that tradition — adding a small music school and a performance space. But in 2006, after 35 years in business, the Portland, Oregon-based retailer was struggling, and Einhorn announced it would be closing.

Upon hearing the news, local music teacher Richard Colombo decided he couldn't let that happen. In January 2007, he and his partner, Jim Morris, bought the for-profit retail store and turned the school and concert space into a 501(c)3, not-for-profit organization. The store was folded into the non-profit in 2012. They decided on the non-profit structure believing Artichoke Music would grow into an even greater community resource. Today, Colombo is the artistic director while Kathi Osborne runs the day-to-day operations as executive director.

Ninety percent of the store's product offerings are new, while 10 percent are used with guitars, banjos and mandolins making up the majority of Artichoke's stock. Revenue also comes in the form of customer cash and



Richard Colombo and Kathi Osborne

instrument donations.

Proceeds then go towards different musical outreach programs. One example is the store's partnership with Portland's Metropolitan Family Service through which Artichoke provides weekly music instruction and instruments to disadvantaged children. At the end of the program, the kids perform in a student showcase, and those who see the program through to the end keep their guitars.

"Giving the students the instrument to take care of and practice on at home between their weekly classes helps build a sense of pride and responsibility," Osborne said. "And the look on their faces when we give them the guitar at the end of the course is its own reward."

CREATING A COMMUNITY FEEL

Artichoke provides the feel of a living room — a welcoming

vibe for customers and musicians.

"You can tell right away that there's something different about Artichoke Music," Colombo said. "The storefront has a couch in it and a dining room table to sit and have coffee. People are welcomed and encouraged to sit down and play a song or two."

Customers even get an impromptu guitar or ukulele lesson. "You see this fear and this rigidity in people just kind of melt away as they get into it," Colombo said. "It's so cool."

From the roughly 950-square-foot retail area, customers can see through a set of French doors to the 1,600-square-foot concert space, dubbed Cafe Artichoke, and a 350-square-foot classroom. There are also five small rooms for individual classes. At any given time, about 25 different group classes are on offer.

"One of Artichoke's goals is to create a creative economy, which means we employ musicians," Colombo said, adding that a typical group class might cost \$120 per student and have about 10 students in it. Teachers then get 70 percent of the class proceeds.

When it comes to individual lessons, teachers rent a small room for \$5 per hour and can charge students whatever they like. (Colombo estimated that the average is about \$45 per lesson.) Artichoke doesn't bill the instructors for the space; rental payments are made on the honor system.

Each aspect of the business — the store, school and cafe — feeds the other. Both students and teachers perform at Cafe Artichoke, which seats 60 and features open-mic nights and Saturday night concert series. Admission is a \$5 donation and, on Saturdays, it's \$15 with 70 percent going to the musician.

Events aside, Colombo said he does not feel threatened by the Internet when it comes to the store's sales. "To be able to come in and put your hands on an instrument and have somebody show you this instrument, tell you what it's made of, where it came from, and how to play a chord is a beautiful thing," Colombo said. "People just love it." **MI**