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# RETAIL

ELEFANTE MUSIC | BY JENNY DOMINE

## THE FAMILY ACT

When Al Elefante opened Elefante Music in 1996, he never predicted his passion for music education would evolve into a 500-student lesson program and school music dealership, let alone inspire his family and community. Today, many of Elefante's first students have grown up to become music directors in the schools around the New Providence, N.J., area, where the store is located. These directors rent his instruments and recommend his staff for private instruction.

"Quite a few of his students have made their career in music, specifically music education," said Stefani Healey, Elefante's daughter and company co-owner.

### FAMILY FOUNDATION

Elefante Music opened as three rented lesson rooms on the top floor of a two-story building. Within two years, the studio took over the entire second floor. In 2003, Al Elefante bought the building, renovated it, and added accessories and instrument rentals. His daughters, Healey and Michele Stivalo, joined the business after finishing college. His wife,

Elefante's next generation, from left: Michele Stivalo, Joe Elefante and Stefani Healey



### Elefante Music's lessons studio evolves into a conservatory for the arts

Betty Ann, handles school accounting and billing.

One corner of the building houses Zita's Homemade Ice Cream, which is run by Elefante's nephew, Peter Elefante. The shop is named after Al's mother.

In September, Elefante Music will transform again when the building reopens as The

Performing Arts Conservatory at Elefante Music.

### GROWING COMMUNITY

According to Healey, they considered expanding the retail side of the business but believed a performing arts center would better serve the community. The decision also made financial sense.

"In the back of our heads, with budget cuts, we felt more people would be willing to spend money on the education rather than retail," Healey said.

Despite this shift, Elefante Music's biggest source of income is its instrument rental service, which rents more than 4,000 instruments in New Jersey. And because Elefante

has put a greater focus on education, it stays front of mind among parents when it's time to go from renter to buyer.

"The retail has really grown in terms of step-up instruments," Healey said. "They trust the teachers and want to buy from that trusted source."

Healey said the store plans to further its position as an arts community-builder online with a new Web site that launched in June.

"We really want to get the kids involved with videos, blogs and forums to use as a resource."

### OFF BROADWAY

Because of its location near New York City, many of Elefante Music's teachers are former Broadway professionals.

"We're really lucky to have a lot of Broadway people move out of the city and start their families here," Healey said.

The newest Broadway instructor to start teaching in the store is Elefante's son, Joe, who most recently worked on *Jersey Boys*.

"We are trying to get into the schools with jazz workshops with Joe to get kids interested in music," Healey said. "It's really given a legitimacy to our business." **MI**