

The Washington Post

[Back to previous page](#)

Giving: Cupcake pioneers find philanthropy to be their sweet reward

By [Vanessa Small](#), Sunday, July 24, 2:28 PM

In 2003, before the cupcake became a sensation in bakeries across the country, Charles and Candace Nelson made a promise to themselves one New Year's Day when they began drafting an ambitious business plan based on a single dessert.

"Everyone said a cupcake business is not going to make it, so we knew if we were fortunate enough to be successful, we wanted to be able to give back," said Charles Nelson.

Eight years and 10 stores later, the former investment bankers have proven the naysayers wrong. And they followed through on their pledge, directing \$3 million of the profit from Sprinkles Cupcakes to nonprofit groups and charitable causes.

With each store opening, the couple looks for unique ways to connect to the community. When they opened the District's first Sprinkles shop, Candace Nelson decided to take advantage of her role as a judge on the Food Network's "Cupcake Wars" and challenge congressional staffers to battle each other in a cupcake-designing competition. The all-in-fun contest included a donation of \$10,000 to Fisher House, a lodging center for injured veterans and their families.

Nearly 150 twenty-somethings filled the foyer of the Rayburn House Office Building to watch their fellow staffers as seven teams briskly squirted frosting tubes, sculpted icing with plastic knives and arranged patterns of orange slices and other food atop their stars-and-strips themed cupcakes.

Candace Nelson judged along with Metrocurean food blogger Amanda McClements and Politico reporter Patrick Gavin.

Candace and Charles Nelson hail from Los Angeles, but they help organize all of Sprinkles community efforts, and have given local charitable donations or in-kind services to local schools and nonprofits including Washington Hospital Center Cancer Institute, the Leukemia and Lymphoma



Society's Leukemia Ball 2011, the Junior League of Washington, the Anacostia Watershed Society and George Washington Hospital.

They also donate each day's leftover cupcakes to Crowder Owens Food Bank and Central Union Mission.

The daughter of a general counsel to a multinational corporation who spent part of her youth in Indonesia, Candace Nelson said she grew up to appreciate the efforts of overseas military personnel. That awareness led to a partnership with Fisher House three years ago.

"They send me e-mail updates and they are hard to read because they're so heartbreaking," said Candace Nelson. "We knew they would be a perfect fit here in D.C."

Sponsored Links

ThinkPad X Series Sale

ThinkPad X Series Laptop w/ 2nd Gen Intel® Core™ i7, Starting from \$889
www.Lenovo.com/Ends_7/27

1 Trick to Relieve Joints

See how you can relieve your joints with this fast and easy trick...
EverydayLifestyles.com

\$500,000 Life Insurance

No Exam Necessary. Same- day coverage as low as \$6.month. Free Quotes
USACoverage.com

[Buy a link here](#)

© The Washington Post Company