

Ransom Everglades student sells cupcakes to benefit Lotus House

BY CARLI TEPROFF
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Shelby Hinds got her first taste of baking and decorating in elementary school.

She took a class at Miles Cake & Candy in South Miami-Dade and loved that she could express herself through the cakes she made.

It didn't take long before she began making ornate cakes -- everything from sushi to three-tiered wedding masterpieces -- for friends, neighbors, family members and her school.

When she turned 14, she mixed her passion for baking and her love for helping others and began donating her pastries and time to Lotus House, a transition home in Overtown for homeless women.

Now at 17, Shelby's latest venture is a Valentine's Day Cupcake Drive, with all proceeds going to the shelter.

"I am really excited about the sale," said the Ransom Everglades senior, who will attend Dartmouth in the fall. "I really hope it's a success."

Shelby came up with the idea for the Valentine's Day sale after she heard that she would receive \$250 for being chosen by the Soroptimist International of Coral Gables as the runner-up for the Violet Richardson Award. The award, which she will donate to the Lotus House, is given to young women who have done exemplary work in the community.

"At first I wanted to match it," Shelby said. "But then I decided to set my goal for \$1,000."

She is selling boxes of six cupcakes -- all of which will have a hand-cut heart made out of sugar on the top -- for \$20 each.

"I will make as many as I have to," said Shelby, who fits in baking around her busy school schedule, which includes advanced placement calculus, physics and economics. "I want to donate whatever I can."

Organized and meticulous, Shelby's front room of her Pinecrest home has two tables, one with pink boxes stacked and ready to be packed with the vanilla and chocolate treats and another with her orders. Her family's refrigerator is loaded with organic eggs and the marble counters hold canisters of flour and sugar.

She often gets up early on Saturdays or sometimes bakes after school.

“It's a lot of fun for me,” the soft-spoken teenager said.

“It's definitely a stress reliever.”

Her mother Katherine said she is always blown away by her daughter's handiwork.

“It's astonishing,” she said, saying her daughter didn't inherit the skill from her. “I help her wash the dishes. That's about it.”

Shelby was introduced to the Lotus House through her mother. Katherine Hinds knew the shelter's president and thought it was a good idea to have Shelby make a cake for the shelter's first anniversary, which was in 2006.

Shelby visited the shelter and was hooked. She went home and began planning a cake and sketched out a pond with lotus flowers. She worked for weeks on the handmade blooms and when the time came, her dad delivered the enormous treat.

“I was completely blown away,” said Constance Collins Margulies, president of the Lotus House.

“To see someone her age with such a sense of social consciousness is uplifting to say the least.”

Beyond donating the cakes, Shelby has also gone to Lotus House to teach classes to the woman who live in the shelter.

For Shelby , who says she will likely study physics in college, baking has given her an avenue to be creative and come out of her shell.

“It makes me feel really good to be able to pass my passion onto other people,” she said.

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