

*Lyndi Halpern is the founder and CCO (that's Chief Cupcake Officer) of Once Upon a Cupcake, NYC. Launched just last summer, Lyndi dreams up and makes ice cream cupcakes! When Lyndi isn't making and baking the world's most delicious cupcake combinations with the highest quality ingredients, you can find her volunteering at God's Love and hanging out at events put on by Stonehenge, her building management company. Read our blog post below... a Q & A with Lyndi, our volunteer and businessowner!*

*Tell us about your cupcake company, Once Upon a Cupcake NYC. What's your favorite cupcake that you make?*

Once Upon a Cupcake NYC came to be when I first made them for my boyfriend's birthday. I casually asked him his favorite ice cream/topping combinations and he told me Half Baked with gummy bears and chocolate with bacon. That's exactly what I made in the form of an ice cream cupcake and they came out ridiculous. Being able to make something that is exactly what I know someone will love is the most wonderful feeling.

I have an insatiable sweet tooth and am inspired by everything around me, so coming up with flavors is both crazy fun and really difficult. There's no flavor idea that doesn't sound amazing to me! I try to (re)create things that I know my family and friends will enjoy and I also try to do a mix of creative and classic flavor combinations. I think it's fun to translate a nostalgic flavor like Fluffernutter into an ice cream cupcake so people can experience familiar flavors in a way they never have before. I also try to think outside the box and come up with some more creative and modern flavors like Chocolate Clementine highlighting seasonal ingredients.

In terms of design and finishing touches, I absolutely want my cupcakes to look good because I truly believe you eat with your eyes first. I decorate my cupcakes the same way I garnish my savory food—with an ingredient that's a component of the cupcake, for example, candied clementine peels atop the Chocolate Clementine cupcake.

*Can you tell us about your involvement with God's Love—what got you started, what keeps you coming back? What's your favorite memory of God's Love?*

Years ago when I was growing up, my mom would disappear from time to time, and always on major holidays. Thanksgiving morning when I awoke for the parade, Christmas day even as the snow fell. I missed her like terrible, as I still do any time we aren't together, but I knew she was away for good reason. What she was doing was delivering meals for God's Love We Deliver. She worked (and still does) full time, so it was on these holidays that she was able to help. Her smile was (and is) infectious, her passion intoxicating, and she has an insatiable want to help people.

Fast forward to the present day where I had the incredible fortune of meeting Stephen Covello, Major Gifts Officer at God's Love. As a budding business owner of Once Upon a Cupcake NYC, my outstanding building management company, Stonehenge Partners NYC, set up a tasting of my ice cream cupcakes in the lobby of my apartment building, and as fate would have it, they sent Stephen to help facilitate the evening. Stephen instantly reminded me of my mom and not surprisingly, they clicked, just as we did. His smile, his passion: for God's Love, for life. His energy was electric and meeting him instantly reminded me of the Yiddish word "bashert", meaning "meant to be." As unbelievable as the evening was, I couldn't wait for it to be over so I could be in touch with Stephen, to thank him and to discuss the possibility of me helping and volunteering at God's Love. He set up a day for me to come in for a kitchen volunteer shift, coincidentally during my birthday week.

I've said it before and I'll say it again, it was the absolute best birthday present, and one that will be hard to top for years to come (sorry, family and friends!). Since that day in August, I have continued to come every week for the Wednesday morning 9 AM kitchen shift. Whether we're chopping onions or packing out thousands of meals, those three hours are some of the happiest of my day, my week and honestly, my life. I consider the kitchen in general to be my happy place, and the kitchen at God's Love is no exception. I absolutely adore volunteering and knowing that my work during those three hours is going directly to people in need. It is simultaneously rewarding, humbling and fun, and something I feel so fortunate to be a part of.

I love every minute, hour and week that I spend at God's Love, but one thing I've really loved is making casseroles with Curtis. I remember the first time I did it I asked him how many people it was going to feed and he said somewhere around five hundred. Mind. Blown.

*That's a beautiful story! How do you see these three worlds connecting: Once Upon a Cupcake NYC, Stonehenge and God's Love?*

Being a part of all three things, as unique an experience as they all provide, are all similar to me in that they're deeply rewarding and

exciting. I think that what all three entities share is a commitment to philanthropy as well as creating and maintaining the feeling of a community. Obviously God's Love is all about helping people, but beyond that, they're about creating a community. Between newsletters and town hall meetings, God's Love is constantly keeping its volunteers and supporters in the know and wanting to keep likeminded people with a goal to do good connected. Similarly, Stonehenge is so much more than just a building management company. With innumerable events, they bring residents of all of their properties together with each other, as well as with their neighborhood residents and businesses. They also have a passion for giving back and are extremely proactive, for example hosting a block party to benefit relief efforts for Hurricane Sandy.

Though Once Upon a Cupcake NYC is barely out of the womb, I am so excited at the prospect of growing, and am humbled to have a connection to both God's Love and Stonehenge for inspiration and motivation. Having a charitable aspect of Once Upon a Cupcake NYC is extremely important to me and I hope that as I grow I can only do more in this capacity. I also believe that all of us sharing our roots in New York City is both prominent and special.

*We're so glad to have you in our God's Love community! How do you describe the work of God's Love to others?*

It's hard to put the work that God's Love does into words, but to keep it short and sweet I always say that God's Love feeds those in need, in every sense of the word. God's Love nourishes the stomach, the heart and the soul.