

"One of the biggest personality traits of the cupcake is that it evokes feelings of nostalgia and happiness."



Tribune photos by JEFF HOUCK

Nicole Rogers and Doug Longo sell up to 800 cupcakes daily (Tuesday through Saturday) at The Cupcake Spot, 2401 S. Dale Mabry Highway.

CUPCAKE SHOP

Continued From Page 1



Since then, response has been mushrooming. Valentine's Day saw their tiny storefront crowded with customers looking to spend \$2.75 per cupcake and \$30 for a dozen.

The appeal, she says, is emotional on many levels.

"Cupcakes are a comfort food," she says. "They're versatile, they're portion-controlled, so we don't feel like we're overindulging. They're portable. You can throw away the little wrapper, and they're not messy. You don't have to have plates or knives. They're your own personal cake. You get to have your own flavor. Especially at a party, if someone has different flavors of cupcakes, you get to pick which one you like."

"One of the biggest personality traits of the cupcake is that it evokes feelings of nostalgia and happiness. I'm sitting here and I'm exposed to these things, hundreds of them each day, and I look at them and they're just so darned cute."

Rogers took a break recently from icing cupcakes to talk about what it took to get the business under way and about how she stays focused on the core product when there are so many other distractions and customer requests vying for her attention.

"When we first started this business, we were, like, this is totally different than a public relations firm, where you go out and buy desks and computers and a phone line and went out and got clients and offered them a service. Now, we're not only selling something; we're manufacturing and selling something. For me to leave a lucrative career in public relations, I wanted to do something I loved. And you have to love it because the hours are crazy. For five days a week, it's taking [the entire staff] about 150 to 160 hours to bake, do the food preparation, make the boxes, keep the store clean, do the retail."

We try to introduce new flavors twice a week. Last week, we introduced the S'mores and sold out in an hour. Then we had someone who came in and tried one and ordered 16, so I knew we had a good thing. But there's no one favorite. The Chocolate Elvis, which is our banana cake with the peanut butter butter-cream frosting and the chocolate dollop on top has a small cult following. But so does the Berry Squared.

Some of the recipes were handed down from family and friends. My mother made the strawberry cake since before I was born. The vanilla butter-cream icing actually comes from my grandmother. It's ones that it's been made. The chocolate chip one comes from my Aunt Jenny.

Before we even opened, we got a phone call one day, and I answered, "The Cupcake Spot." The person on the other end yelled, "CUPCAKES! I NEED MY CUPCAKES!" The response has been crazy. Within the first week, we had repeat customers. That was really the most flattering thing.

There's a waitress at a restaurant in the Bay area that also sells cupcakes. She comes in almost every single day. We had a customer come in yesterday who had eaten at that restaurant and told that waitress it was her birthday. Instead of serving up one from the restaurant, the waitress served up one of ours that she had bought, and the customer came in afterward to buy some more.

We have an interesting mix of

customers. We have a lot of salespeople and businesspeople who come in to purchase them to go on sales calls and to take to business meetings. We have lots of mothers who come in with small children and have one cupcake. We have adults and senior citizens. It's crazy. There's no one customer and no one flavor that sells out.

We had some people come in and tell us that they base their holiday travel on going to see cupcake stores around the U.S., and they said they had heard about us on a cupcake blog. We went on the blog, and it appears that there are about 75 freestanding cupcake-only places in the U.S., and they're cropping up really fast.

The whole thing is labor intensive. It takes about 150 hours a week to run this place. We've been selling between 600 and 800 cupcakes a day.

When we first opened, on my Web site, I put, "We do custom designs" because I know how to do that; but then I was inundated and there were only two of us. Now there are a few more of us, and we're growing. Once it gets streamlined, we'll add, then master it, add, then master. Or maybe not master it. The business plan has been modified, like, 100 times already. People are asking us for gluten-free, soy-free, dairy-free. A couple moms have asked me for chocolate milk, which I think is just a double whammy on the chocolate. You can't be everything to all people.

We have a frosting that we've made that has a curry in it. It goes on a chocolate one. I think people are in their comfort zone, and they like what they like. On any given day, we generally have 14 to 16 different flavors. At first, the customers are excited, and then they're overwhelmed, and then they order chocolate or vanilla. I think that eventually they'll start venturing out and trying some of our more exotic flavors.

The same friends who gave me the recipe for our chocolate chip have a niece who is 12. She aspires to work in a cupcake store. I think she thinks that it's glamorous. I actually gave her an application to fill out.

I've already had a request from someone who said, "I'm interested in opening a cupcake store. Can I come back behind the scenes and see your oven and how things work?" I told her I'd answer some of the questions, but it took me two months of intensive research to get where we are. Some of that has to be proprietary. But I would certainly tell someone where I got my boxes. That's no big deal.

We spend collectively about three hours a day putting boxes together. We use about 70 of the big ones a day. In fact, that's what I tell my friends' little niece: "Do you know what goes on behind the scenes at a cupcake store?" There's a lot of dishwashing and box-making and mopping.

The combination thing has really been the biggest challenge for us. The Better Thans, the chocolate chip ones, traditionally came with cream-cheese icing. We had a customer ask to put our chocolate icing on it, so now we sell out of it every day.

I've had a few people come in and ask, "So, did you go to culinary school?" And I've said, "I've just been baking."

Reporter Jeff Houck can be reached at jhouck@tampatrib.com.

TELEVISION

Prayers And Good Thoughts Go Out To Meteorologist Recovering From Stroke

When it comes to hurricane coverage, you have to admire Dick Fletcher's tenacity.

The first time I saw him in action was back in 1985, when Elena pounded our coast and dumped a ton of rain on us.

Fletcher was on the air with marathon coverage. He stayed on as long as he could. His own family had to evacuate, and his two cats were holed up with him at WTSP, Channel 10.

It was hazardous duty because WTSP is on Gandy Boulevard in a flood zone. There have been times when the whole staff had to evacuate, including when Hurricane Charley hit in 2004.

Fletcher had to work out of a makeshift studio without all the razzle-dazzle of computer graphics. He just rolled up his sleeves and did it the old-fashioned way.

He has said that he thrives under pressure.

He's weathered a lot of storms, and now he's in a St. Petersburg hospital after suffering a stroke on Monday. His wife, Cindy, has been asking that viewers keep him in their prayers.

In an interview after he had a stroke in 2003, he told me that it happened one afternoon when he lost control of his eyes and became disoriented just before he was supposed to go on a 4 p.m. newscast.

"I didn't realize I was having a stroke," Fletcher said.

There had been other warning signs that he missed, he recalled. He didn't make it onto the air that day.

He said he had been getting regular checkups, losing weight, keeping down his cholesterol and getting plenty of exercise. But he said doctors suspected he may have had some minor strokes before that day.

He said he was grateful that it



WALT BELCHER
Television Critic
wbelcher@tampatrib.com

didn't happen while he was on the air or while he was driving. He recovered and was back on the air within two weeks.

Fletcher is a nice guy, and we hope to see him back at work soon.

MYSTERY WOMAN: Kellie Martin reprises her role as bookstore owner and amateur sleuth Samantha Kinsey in another "Mystery Woman" movie for the Hallmark Channel.

Her next film, "Mystery Woman: Redemption," airs at 9 p.m. March 1.

THE RICHES: The writers strike has resulted in shortened seasons for two



Tribune file photo (2000)

Dick Fletcher, who suffered a stroke on Monday, was back on the air within two weeks of having one in 2003.

FX series, "Dirt" and "The Riches."

Even though the strike has ended, FX has decided just to run seven episodes of the two dramas rather than resume production this season. The future of both series is in doubt.

"The Riches," about a family of con artists, starring Minnie Driver and Eddie Izzard, will return on March 18.

"Dirt," starring Courteney Cox as the ruthless publisher of a tabloid gossip magazine, will begin its seven-episode run on March 2.

Of the two, "The Riches" enjoyed critical acclaim. Izzard and Driver star as husband and wife grifters who have assumed the identities of a deceased suburban couple.

FOX DATES: Fox has announced that new episodes of the romance-crime drama "Bones" will return April 14. Also, the network's popular "House" will return April 28 with new episodes.

The network also has a new short-run comedy, "Unhitched," featuring Rashida Jones ("The Office"). She hangs out with three unattached, thirtysomething male friends in Boston who are attempting to restart their romantic lives. It begins March 2.

The main male pal is Jack (Craig Bierko), who is newly divorced.

Two dramas debut March 10: "Canterbury's Law" stars Julianna Margulies ("ER") as a driven, workaholic lawyer, and "New Amsterdam" stars Nikolaj Coster-Waldau as John Amsterdam, who has lived in New York since it was New Amsterdam.

He's a former Dutch soldier who risked his life to save an American Indian medicine woman. She rewarded him with a curse — he can't die until he meets the one person he is destined to love.

WEDNESDAY EVENING FEBRUARY 20

| | 8 pm | 8:30 | 9 pm | 9:30 | 10 pm | 10:30 | 11 pm | 11:30 | 12 am | 12:30 | 1 am | 1:30 |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|--|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|---|---|----------------------|------------------------------|
| BROADCAST | 3 WEDU PBS America's Ballroom Challenge: International Latin. (N) | Great Performances: Company. (N) | | | | | | PBS Previews: Carrier (N) | Charlie Rose (N) | | | Great Performances: Company. |
| | 8 WFLA NBC Deal or No Deal (TV) (N) | Law & Order: Criminal Intent: Smile. | Law & Order: Executioner. (N) | | | | News (N) | (11:35) The Tonight Show With Jay Leno (N) | (12:37) Late Night With Conan O'Brien (N) | | | Last Call With Carson Daly |
| | 10 WTSP CBS Big Brother: 'Til Death Do You Part (Live) | Criminal Minds: Lucky. | CSI: NY: Time's Up. | | | | News (N) | (11:35) Late Show With David Letterman (N) | (12:37) The Late Late Show With Craig Ferguson (N) | | | (1:37) Paid Program |
| | 13 WTVT FOX American Idol: The top 12 female singers perform. (N) | | News (N) | | | | News (N) | (11:35) TMZ | The Bernie Mac Show | (12:35) King of the Hill | (1:04) News | (1:34) Paid Program |
| | 16 WUSF PBS The Ride of Our Lives | Burt Wolf: Travels & Traditions | This Old House | Hometown | Attenborough Wildlife Collection: Attenborough in Paradise. | BBC News | Tavis Smiley (N) | Attenborough Wildlife Collection: Attenborough in Paradise. | | | | Charlie Rose (N) |
| | 22 WCLF Ind. Joseph Prince | Love a Child | Life Today | The Steve and Kathy Show | The 700 Club | | Live From Liberty | You and Me: With Richard Dortch. | | | | |
| | 28 WFTS ABC Wife Swap: Blankenship/Phillips. (N) | Supernanny: Wilson-Knutson Family. (N) | Cashmere Mafia: Dog Eat Dog. (N) | | | | News (N) | (11:35) Nightline (N) | (12:06) Jimmy Kimmel Live (N) | | | Entertainment Studios.com |
| | 32 WMOR Ind. Law & Order: Criminal Intent: Masquerade. | 'The Thomas Crown Affair' *** (1999) Pierce Brosnan, Rene Russo. An art thief steals an insurance investigator's heart. | Reno 911! | Will & Grace | Still Standing | Still Standing | Still Standing | Access Hollywood | Blind Date | | | |
| | 38 WTTA MNT Whacked Out Videos (N) Videos | Whacked Out Videos | Masters of Illusion: Impossible Magic (N) (Part 3 of 4) | News Channel 8 at 10 (N) | Everybody-Raymond | (11:05) Seinfeld | (11:35) Sex and the City | (12:05) Temptation (N) | (12:33) Temptation | (1:02) Paid Program | (1:31) Paid Program | |
| | 44 WTOG CW America's Next Top Model: Welcome to Top Model Prep. (N) | Pussycat Dolls Present: Girlicious: Let's Get Girlicious. | The King of Queens | According to Jim | That '70s Show: Drive-In. | That '70s Show | Friends | South Park | Paid Program | Paid Program | | |
| | 49 WRMD TEL La Traicion | Victoria | Pecados Ajenos | Noticiero Telemundo | Titulares y Mas | Decisiones | | | | | | Programa Pagado |
| | 50 WFTT TFT 'Congo' ** (1995, Drama) Dylan Walsh, Laura Linney. Gorila comunicativo ayuda en la búsqueda de ciudad perdida. | Así Es la Vida | Contacto Deportivo (N) | 'Arma Perfecta' ** (1991, Drama) Jeff Speakman, John Dye. Un experto en karate desafia al asesino de su maestro. | | | | | | | | Escándalo TV |
| | 62 WVEA UNI Al Diablo con Los Guapos | Pasión | Don Francisco Presenta | Noticias 62 (N) | Noticiero Univisión | La Hora de la Risa | Salomé | | | | | |
| CABLE CHANNELS | A&E CSI: Miami: Recoil. | CSI: Miami: Vengeance. | CSI: Miami: Whacked. | CSI: Miami: 10-7. | CSI: Miami: Recoil. | CSI: Miami: Vengeance. | | | | | | |
| | DISCOVERY Futureweapons: Non-Lethal Special. | MythBusters: MacGyver Myths. (N) | Smash Lab: Fireproof House. (N) | MythBusters: Steam Cannon. | Futureweapons: Non-Lethal Special. | MythBusters: MacGyver Myths. | | | | | | |
| | DISNEY (8:15) 'Go Figure' (2005, Drama) Jordan Hinson, Whitney Sloan. | That's So Raven | Life With Derek | Zack & Cody | Hannah Montana | Replaceable | Kim Possible | Emperor Drgn | American Drgn | | | |
| | FAMILY 'Casper' *** (1995, Fantasy) Christina Ricci, Bill Pullman. | America's Funniest Home Videos | The 700 Club | | | Whose Line? Whose Line? | Paid Program | Paid Program | | | | |
| | FX 'Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines' *** (2003, Science Fiction) Arnold Schwarzenegger, Nick Stahl. | 'Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines' *** (2003, Science Fiction) Arnold Schwarzenegger, Nick Stahl. | | | | | | | | | | |
| | HISTORY Modern Marvels: The Butcher | MonsterQuest: Birdzilla. | UFO Hunters: Crash and Retrieval. (N) | UFO Files: UFO Hot Spots | Modern Marvels: The Butcher | MonsterQuest: Birdzilla. | | | | | | |
| | LEARN The 750-Pound Man | Dr. G: Medical Examiner: Broken Lives. | Big Medicine: Obesity and Children. (N) | The 750-Pound Man | Dr. G: Medical Examiner: Broken Lives. | Big Medicine: Obesity and Children. | | | | | | |
| | LIFE MOV 'Stranger in My Bed' (Luner, Chris Kramer. (2005, Suspense) Jamie | (9:51) 'Dangerous Intentions' (1995, Docudrama) | (11:42) 'At the Mercy of a Stranger' * (1999) | | | | | | | | | |
| | NICK SpongeBob | Drake & Josh | Home Improvement | Home Improvement | George Lopez | George Lopez | Fresh Prince | Fresh Prince | Home Improvement | Home Improvement | George Lopez | George Lopez |
| | SCIFI Ghost Hunters: Shadow People. | Ghost Hunters International (N) | Ghost Hunters: U.S.S. Lexington. | Ghost Hunters International | Ghost Hunters | Ghost Hunters | | | | | | |
| | TBS Family Guy | Family Guy | House of Payne | House of Payne | House of Payne | Sex and the City | Sex and the City | 10 Items or Less | 'Paycheck' ** (2003) (PA) Ben Affleck, Aaron Eckhart. | 'The Caine Mutiny' *** (1954) Humphrey Bogart, Jose Ferrer. | | |
| | TCM 'Some Like It Hot' **** (1959, Comedy) Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon. | (10:15) 'Stalag 17' *** (1953, War) William Holden, Otto Preminger. | | | | | | | | | | |
| | TNT Law & Order: Obsession. | 'Enough' ** (2002, Suspense) Jennifer Lopez, Billy Campbell. | Cold Case: Factory Girls. | Without a Trace: Gung-Ho. | Without a Trace: Legacy. | | | | | | | |
| | TV LAND M*A*S*H | M*A*S*H | Sanford and Son | Sanford and Son | Sanford and Son | Sanford and Son | M*A*S*H | M*A*S*H | Just Shoot Me | Just Shoot Me | Beverly Hillsbillies | Beverly Hillsbillies |
| | USA Law & Order: Special Victims Unit | 'Hostage' ** (2005) Bruce Willis, Kevin Pollak. A former hostage negotiator tries to help a captive family. | | | | | | | Law & Order: Criminal Intent | Law & Order: Criminal Intent | Belly of the Beast | Belly of the Beast |

TALK SHOWS

7 a.m. (8) Today. Singer Bette Midler; actress Jessica Lange. (N) (CC) 36643
7 a.m. (10) The Early Show. (N) (CC) 83575
7 a.m. (28) Good Morning America Sunday. Author Todd Wilbur; actor-record producer Sean "Diddy" Combs. (N) (CC) 28391
9 a.m. (13) Live With Regis and Kelly. Actor Dennis Quaid. (N) (CC) 78778
10 a.m. (8) Daytime. 55778
10 a.m. (15) The Morning Show With Mike & Juliet. (N) (CC) 90914
10 a.m. (28) The Martha Stewart Show. (N) (CC) 14198
10 a.m. (38) Maury. (CC) 5949643
11 a.m. (28) The View. A woman

who wrestled a gun from a man at a day care center. (N) (CC) 27662
Noon (3) Charlie Rose. (CC) 61204
Noon (8) Today. (N) (CC) 73466
Noon (32) The Tyra Banks Show. (CC) 28204
1 p.m. (8) Montel Williams. Announcing the winner of the Teens Fight Fat Challenge. (N) (CC) 10594
1 p.m. (32) Jerry Springer. (CC) 37952
3 p.m. (8) Rachael Ray. Singer Enrique Iglesias; "Dancing With the Stars" winner Helo Castroneves. (N) (CC) 35339
3 p.m. (32) The Tyra Banks Show. Contestants from past seasons of "America's Next Top Model." (N) (CC) 42285
3 p.m. (38) The Steve Wilkos

Show. (N) (CC) 9272372
4 p.m. (8) Oprah Winfrey. (CC) 14846
4 p.m. (28) The Ellen DeGeneres Show. TV personality Lauren Conrad; 8-year-old Alec Greven discusses the book he wrote about how to talk to girls. (N) (CC) 12020
4 p.m. (32) Jerry Springer. A woman tries to steal her sister's man; a woman is not ready to let go of her prostitute lifestyle. (N) (CC) 54020
4 p.m. (38) Maury. Lie-detector tests. (N) (CC) 9291407
5 p.m. (10) Dr. Phil. A woman says her husband is controlling and abusive. (N) (CC) 6730
11:30 p.m. (16) Tavis Smiley. Willie Brown, former mayor of San Francisco. (N) (CC) 87952
11:35 p.m. (8) The Tonight Show

With Jay Leno. Singer Garth Brooks; actress Christina Ricci. (N) (CC) 36850440
11:35 p.m. (10) Late Show With David Letterman. Actor Kelsey Grammer; Foo Fighters perform. (N) (CC) 59879198
Midnight (3) Charlie Rose. (N) (CC) 89518
12:06 a.m. (28) Jimmy Kimmel Live. Actor Johnny Knoxville; comic Ben Kronberg. (N) (CC) 4085624
12:37 a.m. (8) Late Night With Conan O'Brien. Randy Jackson ("American Idol"); The Whigs perform. (N) (CC) 2057266
12:37 a.m. (10) The Late Late Show With Craig Ferguson. Race car driver Darío Franchitti; Ziggy Marley performs. (N) (CC) 1229711
1 a.m. (16) Charlie Rose. (N) (CC) 67082