Cookies for the Cause: Journalism Alumna Bakes for the Common Good

March 03, 2020

Alumna Cathy Daniel Bakes Up Donations to Combat Senior Loneliness
Cathy Daniel found the ingredients for making friends and making a difference in a small galley kitchen.

In 1995, the newly-minted graduate of the MSU School of Journalism started her news career in Michigan at WJRT, then WLNS and then WNEM before moving in 2000 for a job at the CBS affiliate in Philadelphia. While working in the number 3 media market was exciting, she often longed for the pace of small-town Michigan, and for the seasonal traditions she had shared with her late mother.

“News doesn’t stop because it’s a holiday,” said Daniel, a three-time Emmy-Award winning TV producer. “Because I was far from my home, I was looking for a way to celebrate and connect with new people. I was also looking for a way to honor my mom, who had passed away when I was young.”

Daniel discovered the answer by mixing up batches of cookies reminiscent of her mother’s recipes. Those cookies then became the main course at a 21st-century cookie exchange—one involving signature cocktails and socializing in her small big city apartment. Attendees baked and brought their favorite cookies, too, for an event that warmed hearts and cooled the fever pitch of intense careers.

Today, Daniel’s holiday cookie parties have been sweetened by a new ingredient. In 2017, Daniel formulated the idea for the #dough4good fundraiser to benefit GlamourGals. In three years, she has raised thousands of dollars to support the nonprofit focused on ending senior isolation.

“There are always so many ways to give back,” said Daniel. “I had to think out of the tiny apartment box so-to-speak and think of something I could do that could help. When I saw more than 100 TV industry people attending one of my first cookie exchanges, I knew that if we all donated a dollar to a cause we could make a difference, too.”

Collecting ‘Doughnations’
Daniel hosted her first holiday cookie party in Philadelphia. The idea followed her to New York City a few years later as she pursued a career as a television producer. Today, Daniel works as a supervising field producer for House Hunters International and lives in a 350-square-foot New York apartment.

Driven to volunteer and by the thought of blending fundraising into her cookie parties, Daniel contacted Rachel Doyle, the founder and CEO of the GlamourGals Foundation. Daniel was inspired by the nonprofit that rallies teen volunteers to provide companionship and complimentary makeovers to women in senior living. For her, it was an idea that hit close to home.

Shortly after graduating from MSU, Daniel’s mother passed away. Daniel wanted to do something to honor her and to give back in a way that symbolizes her mother’s generous and caring nature. When she discovered GlamourGals, Daniel knew it was the perfect fit for a fundraiser in Evelyn Daniel’s name.

“My mother gave me and my brother so many opportunities—ones she didn’t have growing up on a farm,” she said. “That’s pretty cool. She was always doing things for people who needed help. I wanted to make sure I honored her in the best possible way for all the sacrifices she made.”

This year marked Daniel’s third charitable cookie party through #dough4good—the campaign she cooked up with Doyle’s expertise. The first year, she set a goal of raising $100 to benefit GlamourGals. She raised $1,000. The next year, she raised a little more. In 2019, she exceeded expectations and raised more than $6,000—simply by asking people to attend her exchange, host their own, or donate in person or on-line to the cause.

“My friends and I always talk about people having good hearts,” Daniel said. “My mom would have been extra tickled to see how cookie baking and sharing could benefit an organization like GlamourGals.”

The Beauty of Giving
GlamourGals Founder Rachel Doyle was taken by Daniel’s energy, enthusiasm and kindness. She remarked that Daniel’s creative approach to fundraising prompted more people to get involved and support the foundation. Daniel’s media savvy, too, helped draw the attention of The Today Show, which featured Daniel and the #dough4good campaign during peak holiday baking and volunteer time.

Funds raised through #dough4good go directly to GlamourGals operations, including sponsoring chapters, training and programming, and connecting teen volunteers with the seniors they serve. It’s a winning recipe, said Doyle, that helps align people with each other, while combatting senior isolation and elder loneliness. Today, GlamourGals 100-plus teen chapters in North America are changing the fact that 60 percent or 1.4 million seniors in homes never receive a single visitor.

“Cathy understands that good ideas take work,” said Doyle. “She follows through as if it were her job. In the nonprofit world, you can’t ask for anything more.”

Daniel plans to continue her cookie exchange tradition while baking up new ideas to support the cause. She recently participated in a leadership summit through GlamourGals aimed at helping teen volunteers up their skills and became a member of the GlamourGals Advisory Council. An increasing number of Spartans are also active supporters of #dough4good, including those who attended Daniel’s very first cookie exchange parties when she first graduated and relocated to the East Coast.

“I owe a lot to MSU,” said Daniel. “It opened the world to me. I use the things I learned in J-school every day. I am a storyteller and a dreamer. MSU was the place that said to me ‘if you have a dream, let’s make it happen.’”

By Ann Kammerer