

A Charity Destined to Thrive

By **Heather Bremner** | Photos by **Denise Kramer**



Charity Prestifilippo has served her share of pizza over time, but there is one particular pie she will never forget.

It was 9:30 one night when Charity, who with her husband owns Temecula's Spuntino Pizzeria & Delicatessen and Gourmet Italia, picked up the phone. It was a family friend calling to ask if it was too late to stop by for pizza. Charity promised to keep the doors open for them.

A few minutes later the family showed up and placed their order. While munching on the cheesy goodness, the subject came up of a little girl named Haley. The child is one of the beneficiaries of Charity for Charity, a non-profit founded and led by Charity. Haley suffers from epidermolysis bullosa, a rare genetic disorder. Children with EB are known as "butterfly children" because their skin is as fragile as the wings of a butterfly, and every day Haley's mother has to wrap her delicate daughter's skin in bandages that can cost \$2,000 a month.

"It's a rare disease," Charity began to explain, but before she could continue, she noticed her friend's face. "Seriously, his jaw dropped and his slice of pizza fell to his plate" she said. Charity assumed he had never heard of the disorder, but it was quite the opposite. Her friend was more than familiar with EB ... his company is the number one supplier of the bandages. "We will provide them for the little girl!" he told her.

Random coincidence? Serendipity? Charity doesn't bat an eye before saying "It's not. It's God. It's unexplainable other than the fact that God does these things and this is God's organization."

Charity didn't start out planning to run a full-fledged charity. "It kind of fell into my lap," said the spunky blond. In 2006 when one of their servers died in her sleep, leaving behind her three-year-old son, the De Luz resident sprang into action. Using her connections from the restaurant, Charity managed to organize a benefit concert at Stuart Cellars, raising \$25,000 for the little boy. "Our customers felt a connection because she was a server there," Charity said. "They wanted to be there for her child. For me, this first-hand experience—everyone coming together for this cause—was mind blowing."

This mother of three hung up her charitable apron and went on with her busy life. Yet, a year later, "I heard my name called once again," she said. A family friend had recently had a large tumor removed from his back and the surgery caused him to lose all feeling in his legs. He and his wife were now facing a mountain of medical bills. "I wanted to do more than just write a check," says the self-proclaimed born party planner. And with that, Stars of the Valley Awards Party & Benefit was born. The Golden Globes-esque event

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includes a red carpet, paparazzi, and of course, awards. The event was another success—they raised \$10,000—and Charity decided to make it annual.

These touching stories and numerous others make it appear that Charity for Charity thrived immediately, but like any grassroots organization, it went through growing pains. Initially the non-profit was run by a group of Charity's girlfriends who loved coming together for a good cause. But as the organization grew, the responsibilities required too much time away from the women's personal lives, and now that Charity for Charity was operating at a different level, they needed additional expertise. The organization now has executive and advisory boards populated with knowledgeable individuals who volunteer their time and savvy. They also have an office with a paid administrator. Everyone else who serves the organization is a volunteer.

What began as charitable events for individual causes has grown. Charity for Charity now fulfills wishes for individuals with a variety of needs. Those wishes might range from something as simple as a trip to Disneyland for the family of a child with a serious illness, to helping a disabled high school student achieve her dream of attending Stanford University.

Although the organization absorbs much of Charity's free time, she doesn't waste time patting herself on the back. "I don't deserve the credit. I'm just doing what I'm supposed to do. God is omnipresent, so if I can represent God's will, I'm honored to do that. I'm just the orchestrator, the conductor," she says with a laugh that is contagious.

The next annual **Stars of the Valley** event is February 7, 2015. Beneficiaries' stories and wishes will be presented at this not-to-miss evening.

Visit charityforcharity.com for beneficiary applications (beneficiary hopefuls must live in the Temecula Valley), to learn more about fun, fundraising events, and lots more!

UPCOMING EVENTS

- August 27: **Bottles 'N Brushes**
- September 21: **Ladies Luxury Day**
- October 12: **Wine Maker Dinner**
- November 1: **Hollywood Halloween Party**
- November 20: **Gift Thanks**
- December (date to be determined): **Christmas Bunco**



Charity (standing right) with honorees from Stars of the Valley 2014



Charity (4th from left) at recent polo event for charity



Charity with attendees of "Gift Thanks" event at Temecula City Hall