

Music has given me so much. I still play every day. I play at my book signings. I'm the musical director at Clarion Concerts in Columbia County [New York], and I'm still very engaged in that.

GM: Is there a particular message you hope the Celebrating Hope audience will take away from spending time with you?

EZ: My intention is to share my belief that even given a frightening diagnosis, there is still time to be productive and to enjoy life one day at a time. My book makes it clear that it's possible to do these things even with this difficult diagnosis.

Also, I grew up in West Hartford and went to school there. I really want to say it's so great to be honored in Connecticut, which I still consider home.

GM: You seem to be defying a stereotype that Alzheimer's patients withdraw from life.

EZ: You know, some people do find the diagnosis devastating and allow the darkness in. But here's my intention: I want to do the best I can, while I can, to help people understand the disease. There's no cure yet, but there's great hope, and there are many people working on this. All I can say is that every day I wake up feeling positive. We know the Alzheimer's Association will find a cure. We just don't know when. It's wonderful to go to places like this gala where I can share my positivity.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Some questions and answers were edited for brevity and clarity.

CELEBRATING HOPE
Apr. 25 / SAT
6:30PM
Belle Haven Club
100 Harbor Drive Greenwich

For tickets go to celebratinghope.givesmart.com or call 203-807-5845

BEHIND THE EFFORT

Greenwich residents **Jim** and **Kate Clark** have been personally impacted by Alzheimer's, which currently **affects 5.8 million Americans** living with the disease and millions more of their caregivers. Together, they have teamed up to serve as this year's Celebrating Hope 2020 cochairs. We asked the Greenwich couple to reflect on why they're involved.

"My mom died about ten years ago from Alzheimer's and I am honored to cochair this event with my wife, not only to honor my mother but also to help raise funds for the research and eventual cure for this terrible disease, as well as for the care of those afflicted by it."

—JIM CLARK

"When my aunt was diagnosed three years ago, I called the Alzheimer's Association. I didn't want to be part of this club, but it's comforting to know there are people to talk to. It's hard for my dad to see his mirror image—his sister—deal with this disease. It's also a huge financial stress that takes a toll on everyone. We don't want our children or grandchildren to go through this. The more research there is, the closer we are to ending this disease."

—KATE CLARK



Baking News

Now that she's perfected the artistry and expertise required of a master baker, **TRACY YORT** is going nuts

BY MARY KATE HOGAN

An accomplished home cook and baker with Martha Stewart-level finesse, Tracy Yort has always celebrated special occasions by creating treats for family and friends. Then her grateful friends urged her to go pro. "My love for sugar, details, flowers and friends led to the birth of Buttercream Blossoms," she says. What sets apart her baked goods? They're topped with buttercream, more difficult to work with than fondant but also more delicious. Each is a work of art. "I'm crazy about the details," Tracy admits. Caterers and party planners took notice, and soon she was being hired for large events. Though she has access to a commercial kitchen, she prefers working from her Belle Haven home. One culinary endeavor led to another when this entrepreneurial mom of three got requests for another foodie obsession, her addictive spiced nuts. So she partnered with a friend to bring Pure Happinuts to market. We sat down with Tracy to get the 411 on her food biz adventures.



Earliest food memory?

Learning to cook and bake with my mom. She went from serving TV dinners in front of the *Sonny and Cher* show to becoming a true gourmet, having the good fortune of taking cooking classes in San Francisco from the best: Marcella Hazan, Jacques Pepin and James Beard. Soon we had fresh pasta drying on the backs of chairs and amazing cinnamon rolls scented the house. My dad had become president of a Silicon Valley startup, and my mom's initial motivation for learning to cook was to entertain at home. The timing was perfect. My mom and I cooked and baked as a team, a special bonding time with me as her sous chef. My parents wined-and-dined execs at Bank of America and persuaded them to back his new venture.

Favorite dessert?

Key lime pie. I am a Southerner at heart. I love their warm nature, hospitality and kindness.

How did you get started?

Four years ago I took a leap of faith and flew to England to learn techniques from one of my Pinterest favorites, Maha Mohammed of Arty Cakes. After twenty-four hours of instruction, I returned with skills to make realistic, delicious buttercream flowers. For a friend's birthday, I baked an angel food cake covered in buttercream hydrangeas and roses,

and she loved it so much she asked me to take on her daughter's wedding cake. I had four months. Having no experience with stacked cakes, I took a class with wedding cake pro Erica O'Brien to master the essentials. The nerve-wracking delivery of the three-tiered, buttercream-frosted wedding cake in peak summer heat to a Rye beach club was a test of courage. Thankfully, it was a success, and the father of the bride is still my biggest fan. From this first job, my business spread by word of mouth, and my cupcakes, cookies and cakes have become popular at parties.

Most memorable project(s)...

Three years ago a close friend was battling kidney cancer, and for a charity benefit in his honor, Rock Out for The Cure, I made unique rock 'n' roll electric guitar cookies for each guest. Other projects I've loved working on include cookies made to look like dogs that were wedding ring bearers as well as hand-painted tree cookies symbolic of a couple's coming together after the passing of their first spouses.

Biggest challenge...

My first and only wedding cake! Another challenging but fun project was a birthday cake incorporating a friend's favorite foods: lemon cake, French fries and potato chips. It was a big hit when guests tasted the pound-cake "fries" with red buttercream "ketchup".

How did you branch out into the nuts business?

Years ago I received a roasted nuts recipe that I refined many times until it was the perfect mix of salty, sweet and savory.



I keep these roasted nuts on my kitchen counter and send my kids off to college with them. Everyone asks for more. To keep myself from going nuts, I launched the nut line by partnering with Nicky Clifford, a friend who loves them and has the strengths I lack.

The small-batch, artisanal blend contains organic rosemary from my garden that seasons the cashews, pistachios and almonds in Simply Nuts, Classic (with added dried cherries) and Cocoa Nuts (with added dark chocolate chunks). We're working on additional flavors, but right now these are sold in The Perfect Provenance and Grayson De Vere in Greenwich and Back 40 in Old Greenwich. buttercreamblossoms.com and purehappinuts.com

