



## Miami mayor, Nashville recording artist deliver cakes for charity

Miami native and Nashville recording artist Keith Anderson (left) presents a blueberry cheesecake to Chief Ethel Cook, which she won after placing the winning bid of \$1,000. Cook hands off her check to Mackenzie Garst, executive director of the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa County, while Miami Mayor Bless Parker (right) gives Garst additional cash donations that were received.

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Stay tuned for more cheesecake auctions and consider placing a bid for a local charity to be part of the [#negativeintoapositive](#) campaign.

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What started as the purchase of cream cheese at a local store wound up benefiting two local organizations. Miami mayor Bless Parker turned a negative experience into something positive and the community once again proved how much it cares.

The woman happened to be the mayor's mom, Margaret Anderson, and she was buying a large amount of cream cheese to make cheesecakes for Christmas.

The mayor said he had no idea there was a shortage of cream cheese and there was no limit on how many could be purchased.

“My mother was having a conversation with a friend of hers in the next aisle while they were both checking out,” explained Parker. “Well, the lady behind them heard



Nashville recording artist and Miami native Keith Anderson (left) presents Gordon William Jr.'s check for \$1,500 to Miami Salvation Army director Debbie Hillestad while Mayor Bless Parker presents her with the cash donations. Williams had the winning bid but was out of town during the presentation.

that she was my mother and was upset about the amount of cream cheese she was buying.

“So, she goes to the Miami Area Sh\*tshow Facebook page and makes

a post about my mom being entitled and privileged because she's the

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mayor's mom. No one in my family has ever been privileged or entitled. It's just not the way we work."

He said he began receiving messages from people asking him if he'd seen the post, which he said he hadn't because he's not on that particular Facebook page.

"I did respond to it by a post," he said. "The next morning when I woke up, which was Christmas morning, I thought, 'you know what, I'm going to do a video. I'm going to tell everyone Merry Christmas and I'm going to talk about this cream cheese deal real quick and I'm going to auction off a pie and donate it to charity because that's who my family is.'"

The mayor said he didn't want to be portrayed incorrectly in the community. He auctioned off one of his mom's homemade cherry cheesecakes, thinking it would be great if it earned the charity \$500.

He was certainly surprised at the outcome.

"We ended up getting \$2,000," Mayor Parker said. "Gordon Williams Jr. bid \$1,500 and there was another \$500 in additional donations through PayPal."

The initial cheesecake auction benefited Miami's Salvation Army. Williams told Parker that he just wanted to be part of the positive.

During Parker's initial auction, hometown musician and Grammy-nominated country music recording artist Keith Anderson loved what he saw happening. Anderson, who

was home for the holidays, is Parker's brother by marriage. His dad is married to the mayor's mom.

"So, Keith called me and said come over tomorrow and we'll do a blueberry cheesecake and raise more money. I went over the next morning to mom's and I did the video with Keith. We had some fun with that."

The winning bid for Mrs. Anderson's homemade blueberry cheesecake went to Ottawa Tribe Chief Ethel Cook for \$1,000. The second auction also raised an additional \$1,075 through PayPal donations for a grand total of \$2,075, which went to the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa County.

The mayor's impromptu cheesecake auctions raised a grand total of \$4,075 in two days for two great local organizations.

"I guess the thing that bothers me the most is the lady that kind of stirred this all up," said Parker. "This was someone outside our community that stirred up a stink. I want our community to be positive and move forward together."

"The great thing was the community rallied together. They didn't let this deter us. We plowed forward. We did something great from it so that's why we started the #negativeintoapositive."

"That's really what our community needs to do with everything. We got a lot of negatives that stew around in the community. We've got to find a way to turn those negatives into positives so we can be successful."

"If we work together, we can make that happen. That's the message I want to come from this is let's turn negatives into positives and that's what'll move this community forward."

The mayor talked about Goodrich being a negative in the community for 30-plus years and how he's working hard to change that into a positive.

"I'm going to make that happen. We're going to make that a positive," he said. "We got a lot of good things going to happen for Miami in 2022 and we're going to ride this positive straight through '22 into '23 and just keep going."

"We've got a really strong city council and we're all on the same page, we all want to move forward. We all do this as a volunteer, but we don't do it just to sit around and eat bonbons."

"We're doing it because we want to make our community better. We don't always agree on everything but the one thing we do agree on is making Miami a better place for the people that live here, the people that move here and the kids that come back here."

Parker said one of the best things about Miami is that the residents have always been the kind of people who took care of one another. What happened over Christmas weekend reaffirmed that.

"The people of Miami are our biggest asset," said Parker.

The mayor wanted the winning bidders to help present the money to the organizations. Unfortunately, Williams was out of town during the presentation to the Salvation Army, but Chief Cook was available for the presentation to the Boys & Girls Club. Anderson also took part in the presentations to everyone's delight.

The presentations were made at the Otter Cove Diner & Gift Shop. In an additional act of charity, Chief Cook donated her blueberry cheesecake, which was put in the dessert case at the diner. Otter Cove was going to sell the eight slices for \$5 a slice and donate the proceeds to a charity.

"I realize I could have been mad; I could have been upset, and don't get me wrong, at first, I was a little upset," Parker said. "But I thought, you know what, that's not the way to handle this. The way to handle this is to make something good out of it and I think if we continue to do that in our community with the obstacles we face, we can really move the needle and get somewhere."

Due to the extreme popularity of the cheesecake auctions, some generous donors bought more cream cheese and donated it to Mrs. Anderson for another round of cheesecake auctions. Parker organized two more auctions, which took place over New Year's Eve and into New Year's Day.

He said he was inundated with names of organizations to donate the money to, so he was going to have to pull two of them out of a hat to be fair.

Starting on New Year's Eve, Parker announced on Facebook that he would hold two auctions simultaneously — one for American Legion Post 147 and one for the Child Advocacy Center of Ottawa County.

Another difference was both the winning bidder and the backup bidder would win their choice of cheesecake, and both their bids would be donated to the corresponding charity.

Steve Maxson who had the winning bid of \$500 for the American Legion and Cook had the backup bid of \$200. With another \$45 in PayPal donations, the total going to the Legion is \$745.

For the Child Advocacy Center, the winning bid of \$500 went to Donald Patterson and the backup bidder was Steve Maxson with \$250. Another \$25 was collected in PayPal donations for a total of \$775 going to the Center.

Parker sends out a special thank you to all the bidders and donors in all four auctions.

Everyone has had so much fun with the "Cheesecakes for Charity Auctions" that an even bigger auction is already being planned for Valentine's Day.

Stay tuned for more cheesecake auctions and consider placing a bid for a local charity to be part of the #negativeintoapositive campaign.



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