

They may be amateur efforts featuring family recipes, but cookbooks can raise millions for charity



Charity golf tournament: \$200,000. Fund-raising gala dinner: \$600,000. Community cookbook: \$2.68 million and counting.

Grassroots organisations and non-profit community groups are discovering that compiling recipes into cookbooks can raise millions of dollars for their welfare programmes, never mind if most of these books are amateur efforts lacking the polish of a celebrity chef tome.

After all, what is there not to like about a gift that keeps giving? Buyers are rewarded with treasured family recipes and heart-warming dishes in the kitchen.

In the last two years, at least six such charity cookbooks, featuring recipes from volunteer contributors, were published and they have all proven to be hot-sellers.

Of these, the cookbook by Boon Lay constituency, Boon Lay... Blending With Food, raised a record sum of over \$2.68 million. This amount is all the more significant given that many are tightening their purse strings during the recession.

A total of \$500,000 was raised from 50 copies of the book that were signed by President S R Nathan and sold for \$10,000 each. The remainder is made up of donations and the sale of over 800 copies since its launch last month.

The idea for the cookbook came about after Madam Ho Geok Choo, MP for the Boon Lay ward in West Coast GRC, tasted the snacks made by residents during Meet-The-People sessions. She liked the food and suggested publishing a book with recipes from residents to raise funds for the ward's welfare programmes.

Mrs Tan Lai Oi, the women's executive committee chairman of Boon Lay Community Centre, who helped compile it, says: "Publishing a cookbook allowed everybody to be involved, from contributing and testing recipes to editing the book. This made the project especially meaningful."

Contributors came from all strata of society, including Bangladeshi shipyard worker Azaharul Abdul Maleque, who stays in Boon Lay and shared his recipe for Bangladeshi mutton curry.

While charity cookbooks may be a less conventional way of raising funds, there is no denying their appeal.

Mrs Betty Chen, 82, president of the Chinese Women's Association (CWA), says: "Food is an essential pleasure of life and people are interested in cooking, so a cookbook is a good fund-raising idea."

The Chinese Women's Association Cookbook was published in 2007 to raise funds for the Henderson Senior Citizens' Home, which has been under its auspices since 1978.

More than \$100,000 have been raised so far. All the 2,000 hardcover copies are sold out but softcover copies are still available at the association office in Bukit Merah View.

Unlike donations made to other fund-raising drives, those who buy a charity cookbook take home more than just a tournament trophy or pleasant memories from a glitzy gala event.

As Ms Lee Hup Kee, 21, chairman of Patchworks, a social welfare group at Nanyang Technological University, says: "They get to own a part of Singapore's culinary heritage because the recipes in our Patchwork Of Flavours cookbook are handed down through the generations to our contributors, who are mostly elderly Singaporeans."

Patchwork Of Flavours was launched in 2007 to raise funds for three elderly homes and a senior volunteer programme. It



Contributors to the YWCA cookbook *Sharing From Our Hearts* include (back row, from left) Mrs Anne Loh (wedding bliss dessert), Mrs Renu Winson (mutton bryani), Ms Suhanah Alwi (hot lemak prawns), Mrs Maureen Nguee (sayur lodeh istimewa) and (front row, from left) Mrs Dancy Thong (tiramisu) and Ms Tan Kee Leng (pineapple cheese cake).

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Recipes from the heart

raised over \$30,000 from the sale of more than 2,000 copies and spawned a Chinese version, launched last month.

Putting together a charity cookbook, however, is a labour of love which involves making calls for contributions, sifting through submissions, testing out the recipes, photographing the dishes and designing the layout.

For bilingual cookbooks, there is the added step of translating the recipes.

The six community groups LifeStyle interviewed spent between three months and two years to compile and publish the charity cookbooks.

Typically, a commercial cookbook takes between six months and a year to get from manuscript to print. For many of these amateur efforts, a major challenge is getting contributors to list the ingredients in standard measurements.

Ms Jolynn Chew, 32, centre manager of Joy Link, a senior citizens' activity centre in Hougang whose 1,000-copy cookbook *Cook With Joy* sold out in four months last year, says: "Many of the contributors are elderly volunteers who cook based on gut feel rather than exact measurements, so we had to get them to weigh the amount of ingredients required for their recipes."

Few contributors, though, find the tedious process a hassle or feel a need to jealously guard their recipes.

Mr Tan Teik Seng, 54, director of an electronics company who contributed recipes to the Boon Lay cookbook, says: "As this is a meaningful fund-raising project, I decided to share my family recipes for



Volunteer Tan Teik Seng's chicken kerabu for the Boon Lay cookbook.

Penang-style chicken kerabu (coconut salad) and fish achar (relish).

"I don't keep proper written recipes, but it wasn't difficult to cook the dishes and jot down the measurements and cooking steps."

Indeed, as laborious as it is to compile recipe books, the cookbook committee from the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) managed to follow up their popular 2007 book, *Sharing From Our*

Hearts, with a 14-month calendar for 2009/2010, which features a dessert recipe for each month.

While some of these cookbooks may have occasional slips in the recipes with vague instructions, incorrect grammar and more ingredients than necessary, they continue to sell well.

Medical doctor Chua Ying Ying, 30, bought *Cook With Joy* as the book's relaxed writing tone appealed to her.

She says: "The cookbook is less pedantic than professional ones because the instructions are not as strict, and this reminds me of the casual way my grandmother used to teach me cooking."

Administrative executive Christine Chong, 50, who bought a Chinese copy of *Patchwork Of Flavours* because of its home-style dishes, says: "When I try out cookbook recipes, I usually adjust the amount of ingredients according to my taste preference. The book's recipe for chicken in rice wine, however, works perfectly."

The YWCA book, *Sharing From Our Hearts*, even inspired Ms Jo-Ann See, a lawyer in her 40s who has never baked before, to make cakes.

She says: "I bought it because it was for a worthy cause and after reading through the book, I decided to try the recipes for tiramisu and suee cake."

"They turned out so well and received such rave reviews from friends and relatives that I have not looked back since."

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10 tips for cookbooks

Keen to publish a cookbook for a good cause, but not sure how to go about it? Ms Lydia Leong, senior editor of cuisine with publisher Marshall Cavendish, shares 10 tips on how to write a good cookbook.

- 1 Identify your culinary niche. This will help to shape the concept or theme of the book, as well as its marketing strategy.
- 2 Be clear whom you are writing the cookbook for. Those for inexperienced cooks should come with step-by-step photographs, a glossary of cooking techniques, kitchen equipment and ingredients.
- 3 Decide on the best way to categorise the recipes according to your theme. For example, recipes in a cookbook on Western cuisine may be grouped by course – appetisers, main courses and desserts, while a cookbook on Asian cuisine may be classified by food type – soups, noodles and rice, meats and desserts.

4 Begin each recipe with a headnote that details the origin, taste or quality of the dish to give the reader a clear idea of what the dish involves. Any advance preparation for cooking should be highlighted too.

5 Include serving sizes with each recipe to help readers gauge the amount of food they will be cooking.

6 Be consistent with the names of ingredients used to avoid confusion. Provide substitutions for those that may not be universally available.

7 List ingredients in order of use, so it is easier to follow through the recipe, and indicate how they are to be prepared.

8 Instructions should be clear and concise. Indicate textures and appearances where applicable to help readers gauge if they have achieved what is required. Additional cooking tips are good and should be written separately.

9 Always kitchen-test the recipes and get someone else to test them as well, so you can be sure the recipes work.

10 If the recipes come with photographs of the final dish, make sure they are true to the recipe.

Yummy recipes

Here is a list of community cookbooks that have been compiled and published here.

BOON LAY...BLENDING WITH FOOD
Price: \$25 (softcover) and \$50 (hardcover)
Where to buy: Boon Lay Community Centre, 10 Boon Lay Place, tel: 6261-9947
What: This 144-page cookbook launched last month is packed with 78 recipes contributed mostly by Boon Lay residents. It features food such as Chinese chilli crab, roti jala (Malay lacy pancakes) and Indian samosa. Proceeds go to the ward's programmes to help residents.

COOK WITH JOY
Price: \$10
Where to buy: Sold out, but Joy Link may consider a reprint or a second cookbook if there are sufficient enquiries for it. Call 6281-5025 for more details
What: The cookbook features 24 recipes in English and Chinese for dishes such as chempedak cake and Thai-style fried olive rice. The recipes were selected from dishes that were taught by senior citizen volunteers during weekly cooking classes at the Joy Link activity centre for the elderly in Hougang. The proceeds went towards funding the centre's programmes.



Volunteer contributor Anna Tay showing how to cook Stuffed Tau Pok, which is featured in the bestselling *Patchwork Of Flavours* cookbook. Her recipe has a healthy mix of meat and vegetables.

CANBERRA – OUR KAMPONG, OUR HOME
Price: \$15
Where to buy: Jelutong Community Club, 2 Sembawang Crescent, tel: 6755-6369
What: This 50-page cookbook features 43 recipes in both English and Chinese, which run the gamut from Hakka abacus seeds to Indian fish curry. It was printed last year to raise funds to help needy residents from the Canberra ward of Sembawang GRC.

PATCHWORK OF FLAVOURS
Price: \$12
Where to buy: Books Kinokuniya and 10 Kopitiam outlets
What: Available in both English and Chinese, the 102-page book features 38 recipes from senior citizens, including chicken in rice wine and minced beef curry. Funds raised go towards supporting the Kheng Chiu Loke Tin Kee Home, the AWWA Com-

SHARING FROM OUR HEARTS
Price: \$30 with a 10 per cent discount
Where to buy: YWCA, 254 Outram Road, tel: 6223-1227

What: This 130-page book features 80 recipes from members of the Young Women's Christian Association. It includes Hakka stewed pork trotters, mutton bryani and pineapple cheesecake. Proceeds go towards community services programmes such as its Adult Day Centre for the elderly.

THE CHINESE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION COOKBOOK
Price: \$30
Where to buy: CWA Office, Block 117 Bukit Merah View, 01-205, tel: 6276-9746, and Tango Mango Bookshop, 03-11A Tanglin Mall, tel: 6835-3895
What: This 152-page cookbook comprises 72 recipes from members of the association, many of whom are society women and wives of heads of industry. Proceeds go towards funding operations of the Henderson Senior Citizens' Home.

munity Home for Senior Citizens, the Geylang East Home for the Aged and the Retired & Senior Volunteer Programme.

MY FAVOURITE RECIPES
Where to buy: A new edition by publisher Landmark Books is due out later this year
What: It is packed with 280 recipes, mostly by Mrs Ellice Handy, a former principal of Methodist Girls' School, and from the family of Madam Kwa Geok Choo, the wife of Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew. The book, first published in 1952, has gone through six revised editions and 10 printings.

OUR FAVOURITE RECIPES
Price: \$15
Where to buy: Methodist Girls' School, 11 Blackmore Drive, tel: 6469-4800
What: The book commemorates Methodist Girls' School's centennial in 1987. It contains 210 recipes contributed by the alumni and friends of the school, including former first lady, Mrs Wee Kim Wee.