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## Local News

# Woman finds a calling in making treats for the troops

Staff Writer

By Donna Porstner

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STAMFORD - The holiday season is one part shopping and a dash of holiday baking, mixed well with random acts of kindness.

But for Connie Telesco, it's a recipe she follows year-round to sweeten the lives of military men and women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.



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She spends two to three nights a week baking chocolate chip cookies, brownies and pies in her North Stamford kitchen and vacuum-sealing the goodies in individual-size packets.

Telesco, whose husband, John, is a Vietnam War veteran, went online three years ago, looking for ways she could support the troops and stumbled upon the Web site [www.anysoldier.com](http://www.anysoldier.com). It links patriotic civilians with troops who sign up to receive care packages for their units and distribute the items to service members who do not get much mail. Telesco said

she liked that there was a name and a picture of the recipient, so she signed up.

"You're not sending it to an organization where you don't know where it's going to end up," she said. "I feel better knowing it's going to someone. To me, it's more personal."

Telesco, 59, a Pitney Bowes administrative assistant, said she has tremendous respect for today's military personnel because, unlike her generation, when there was a draft, today's servicemen and women are all volunteers.

"They chose to serve our country - they weren't forced into the service - and I just think it's admirable," she said.

Although the Web site discourages service members from eating baked goods made by strangers, Telesco starts out by sending store-bought goods and, once she establishes a rapport, personnel can ask permission to receive her signature sweets.

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"I send them packages for a few months, and then send a note and say, 'I love to bake, so I'll send you cookies and brownies, but if you have to throw them out I won't bother,'" she said.

Telesco said she has not been turned down yet, becoming the personal pastry chef for 30 military personnel in the past three years.

Each week, she churns out at least eight dozen chocolate chip cookies, three dozen Rice Krispies treats and three dozen brownies in the kitchen of her Chatham Road home. Everything but the brownies is made from scratch.

Fridays, she packs three cardboard boxes weighing about 20 pounds each filled with homemade treats and store-bought items like granola bars, beef jerky, breath mints, Tootsie Pops and Kraft Easy Mac. In the winter, she puts in hand and foot warmers; in the summer she sends Fla-Vor-Ice and cooling bandanas.

She also takes requests. Over the years, they've asked for sneakers, dryer sheets, pancake mix and the board game Risk.

She mails packages every Saturday.

"The guys know us at the post office now," Telesco said.

U.S. Army Sgt. Kevin Dick, 31, of Carthage, Tenn., received jarred peppers stuffed with garlic, Pop Tarts, country music CDs and other goodies from Telesco when he was stationed in Iraq in 2005. Tucked into every package was a note from Telesco. Often, she included pictures of her and her husband with their 1962 Corvette at classic car shows.

"I don't know how she got my name, to be honest, but she sent me anything and everything I wanted," Dick said in a recent telephone interview. "Pop Tarts, she was on top of."

None of her cookies ever crumbled because they were vacuum-sealed and meticulously wrapped in bubble wrap, he said.

Dick always looked forward to Tuesdays and Saturdays, the mail days for his platoon. "I could count on her religiously," he said. "She sent something two, maybe three times a month."

Telesco even had patients at the Smith House Health Care Center, where she is a volunteer, writing to him and sending him candy and PowerBars.

When Dick and his wife sat down to write their Christmas card list this year, he scoured the house looking for Telesco's Stamford address.

"I got several cards from people all over the United States, but Connie was one of two or three I kept in touch with," he said.

Marty Horn, president of Hoagland, Ind.-based Any Soldier Inc., said dedicated volunteers like Telesco all over the world support the U.S. military through their program. They call them "support junkies."

Since its founding in 2003, Any Soldier has brought packages to nearly 1 million troops through thousands of military personnel who register as contacts. The nonprofit organization now has 4,075 contacts distributing packages in 16 countries, though most go to Iraq and Afghanistan. Horn said he does not know exactly how many packages go out, or how often, because participants send directly to the contacts.

Of all the items sent overseas, the most important are the words of encouragement and support, he said.

"The stuff is nice, but the letter that goes in the box is more important than the box," said Horn, who started the Web site while his son, Brian, an Army infantry soldier, was serving in Iraq in 2003.

Dick said he'll never forget Telesco.

"That was a morale booster knowing people like her were behind us," he said.

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