

FACES IN THE CROWD

Conversation inspires new cookie project

■ Summers starts company division to send sweets to troops overseas

By JACKIE BARKER
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

A conversation with a young serviceman on the practice putting green of Bentwater golf course led Marlene Summers to an ambitious project. She wants to send 1 million chocolate chip cookies to servicemen and women in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"He was the same age as my son, and I thought about sending my own son off to war. I wanted the men and women overseas to know that we care about them," she said.

"When I was in college, my grandmother sent cookies to my roommate and me through the mail. It was always a wonderful surprise to open the mailbox and see a package from her. This led me to start a division of my company called 'Hugs from Grammy by George' to send cookies to our servicemen," Summers said.

Cookie concept

In 1997, she opened Cookies by George, featuring a signature gift of long-stemmed chocolate chip cookies five inches in diameter, which were delivered in a long-stemmed rose box. In time, her company was incorporated under the name of CCBG Inc. and had three divisions, the original Chocolate Chips by George, Hugs from Grammy by George — for the cookies to those in the military service — and Custom Designed Gifts by George, which primarily serves corporate customers.

For every 5-inch gourmet chocolate chip cookie purchased, Summers sends a matching one to a service member, or some people prefer just to make a donation to send cookies. Since Summers started the Hugs from Grammy project



WELCOME BACK: U.S. Army Spc. Michael Johnson admires the big cookies Marlene Summers, left, has brought him as a welcome home present after 14 months in Iraq. Summers and Johnson stayed in contact through e-mail. He told her that sweets were one of the main things soldiers missed.

three months ago, she has 20,000 cookies to be shipped.

A shipment of 2,500 cookies just went to Iraq through Operation Interdependence, a national organization that ships to servicemen year-round. They adopt a unit and make sure every person in the unit gets a gift. For customers who specify a person they want their cookies to go to, Summers handles the shipping and absorbs the cost herself.

Supporting the cause

"When I first announced the Hugs from Grammy project, I received support from many sources. I am grateful to Mike Pfisterer and Chris Collins of Republic National Bank, who were among the first supporters," she said.

COOKIE ORDERS

■ To order chocolate chips cookies for servicemen and women, call 1-888-400-6940 or 936-597-8529, or send mail to: Hugs from Grammy, P.O. Box 1202, Montgomery, TX 77356.

■ Summers said the project will continue until a million cookies are sent.

Summers is a golfer and has received much support from the golfing community. The Bentwater Ladies Golf Association has donated to the project, and when she played in a State Amateur Tournament, the women participating made a contribution. She was contacted by the

Women's Golf Charities of Houston, and it has voted to provide funds to send cookies to servicemen and women. "Golfers are some of the most generous people around," she said.

Others also aid Summers' cause. "This is really a worthwhile project. I support what she is doing for our servicemen," Precinct 1 Commissioner Mike Meador said.

Ann Cole has contributed money to send cookies to Iraq. "They are simply delicious. I know the servicemen will enjoy them," she said.

Family time

Summers, a former teacher who was dance director at Klein High School, originally opened Blooming Delights, a long-stemmed chocolate chip busi-

MARLENE SUMMERS

■ **Community connection:** Bentwater resident

■ **Fast fact:** Has a goal of sending 1 million cookies to soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan

■ **Quick quote:** "Golfers are some of the most generous people around."

ness, with a friend, but they sold the business because their schedules were so full. Cookies by George followed later.

"Most everyone thinks George is the man behind the scenes in the business. This is almost true, however, although George is not who most think. I got that nickname because my big brother and sister wanted a baby brother. Unfortunately, they got me instead and I got the nickname George," Summers said.

The Chocolate Chips by George name is now registered, as well as the logo trademark. Summers has a staff of two full-time women and part-time helpers, ranging up to 11 depending on the jobs under way. She also receives major support from her family, husband Bob, son David, 22; daughter Sherry, 21; and daughter Mary, 18.

Golfing is a favorite activity for all Summers family members. Marlene and Bob met and fell in love on the golf course at Nacogdoches, Texas, when Marlene was playing golf at Stephen F. Austin State University. David lettered in golf all four years at Montgomery High School and now attends Stephen F. Austin State University. Sherry plays golf at Baylor University, and Mary is co-captain of the five-time defending state champion Montgomery High School girls golf team.

If you have a suggestion for a "Faces in the Crowd" profile, contact Alan Fossler at alan.fossler@chron.com or send a fax to 281-362-4466.