

Desserts taste like home

Project reaches out to comfort U.S. troops in Afghanistan

Tassie Tagarelli believes in the power of pound cakes. What started as a favorite dessert enjoyed by her mother soon opened doors for the businesswoman who owns Glen Ellyn's Instincts Design Studio and lives in Glendale Heights. The response to the cakes she gifted to business associates had people urging her to market them.



Dottie Freda Miller

When she finally founded her cake enterprise after her mother's death last year, Tagarelli immediately knew what to call it: Miss Dottie's Pound Cakes. It's a sweet legacy to her mother, Dottie Freda Miller, a community activist in Elmhurst and a woman of many talents — from pilot in the Civil Air Patrol to being one of the first women in the country to have her own radio program. The company logo is a likeness of Dottie in the late 1950s.



Tassie Tagarelli



Submitted photos

How did your online company start Operation Pound Cake for the troops?

One day ... someone walked up to my table at the farmer's market and asked, 'How well do your cakes ship? I'd like to send some to my boys.' I thought she was talking about college kids. Then she said Afghanistan, (and I realized,) you're talking about soldier boys. She bought a couple of my mini cakes. I packed up everything (in my display) and gave it to her: 'Just take it and send it.'

About two weeks later, I get a message on Facebook. 'The gentlemen absolutely loved the cake. And they thought the logo of the lady was so cute, they cut the picture out and put it up on the wall of the barracks.' I



posted on Facebook that I wished I could send hundreds of cakes (through her Books For Soldiers organization, and invited) people to donate toward ingredients. The next morning, all these messages were in my inbox.

You share responses with donors.

You can go to our Facebook and read comments from soldiers and their parents. There are pictures of them eating our cake. It's turned into something out-of-the-blue wonderful. We donate a part of everything



we sell to that fund so we can send more cakes. Through the end of December, for every large cake we sell, we'll donate a mini cake to send to the soldiers in Afghanistan. They asked for something chocolate, so (we also make) brownies.

It's a great way to pay back the two retired Marines who helped you through the grieving process after losing your mother.

They were beyond kind. (Those) two Marines have helped me heal so much



... and now ... sending the cakes to Afghanistan is so near and dear to me.

Where do you make the cakes?

We do our baking downtown at a place in Chicago. My friends own a bakery.

You developed the recipe for your pound cake. What's your secret?

Butter, eggs and cream — all the ingredients are natural. Nothing is artificial, and we use an excellent quality vanilla. We hand measure each cake; it's not mass-produced.

— Renee Tomell