



Girl Scouts at FFV Bakery in the 1960s. Below: A box of Butter Flavored Shorties from 1973.

## Smart Cookie

Girl Scouts celebrate 100 years of sweet success.

—BY SANDRA SHELLEY—

**M**ARY JOHNSON HAS A treasure she's been saving for more than 40 years.

Wrapped in tissue paper, it is a box of Butter Flavored Shorties from 1973. "It still has the cookies in it," laughs Johnson, 80, who was a Girl Scout troop leader in Richmond's East End for 50 years.

She gently unwraps the box, which has on its cover a photo of Senior Girl Scouts singing a campfire song. Her daughter, Juliet Morales, known as Denise to family and friends, is one of the girls in the photo (she is pictured in the upper left of the photo at right).

"Denise started in Girl Scouts when she was about 9 or 10, and she

went all the way up to high school and the senior level," says Johnson.

When Morales was selected to be on the cover, her mother says, "She was excited. Everybody at our church bought the cookies."

Butter Flavored Shorties were no doubt a popular seller that year in Richmond; the girls on the cover were all from local troops who knew each other from camping together, and the cookies were made downtown at the Interbake Foods factory under the Famous Foods of Virginia (FFV) label.

Since then, the popularity of the cookies has not waned. Millions of boxes are sold every year as troops across the country take orders

door-to-door and sell stacks of the familiar boxes from tables set up outside grocery stores. Indeed, buying—and eating—Girl Scout cookies has become, for many, a rite of spring.

And this year the organization celebrates a milestone, with the 100th anniversary of the cookie sales program.

The Girl Scouts began selling cookies a little more than four years after Juliette Lowe founded the organization in 1912 and started the first troop in Savannah, Georgia.

The first known cookie sale took place in 1917. The Mistletoe Troop in Muskogee, Oklahoma, baked

cookies and sold them in their high-school cafeteria to raise funds for a service project. Soon, other troops began selling homemade cookies to raise funds for their activities.

In 1934, the Girl Scouts of Greater Philadelphia Council became the first troop to sell commercially baked cookies. One year later, the Girl Scout Federation of Greater New York did the same, using a die in the shape of the organization's signature trefoil.

Building upon those early successes, in 1936, the national Girl Scout organization began licensing the first commercial bakers to produce cookies, which would be sold by troops nationwide.

Richmond's Southern Biscuit Co. (which would become part of Interbake Foods Inc. in the '70s and continue to produce Girl Scout cookies first under the FFV label, then later as ABC Bakers) became one of the organization's official bakers in 1937.

By 1948, a total of 29 bakers throughout the nation were licensed to bake Girl Scout cookies. That number would begin to shrink in the 1990s, when the national council limited the number to two: ABC Bakers (a division of Richmond-headquartered Interbake Foods) and Louisville, Kentucky-based Little Brownie Bakers, a division of Keebler.

These two bakers alone are now responsible for the 200 million boxes of cookies sold each year, which generate \$800 million in annual sales.

Each of the 112 Girl Scout councils in the U.S. select the baker that will serve the troops for that region, often with the girls involved in the process. Two of the four Virginia councils—Girl Scouts of Virginia Skyline in Roanoke and Girl Scouts of the Commonwealth of Virginia in Richmond—use ABC Bakers. Girl Scouts of Colonial Coast in Chesapeake and Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital in Washington, D.C., use Little Brownie.

Many of the cookies from the two bakers are the same—such as Thin Mints—while others may differ. Little Brownie Bakers' Trefoils, for example, are similar to ABC's





# VIRGINIANA



Clockwise, from above left: Susan Eason (Troop 351) and Valerie Walker (Troop 462) in 1972; Southern Biscuit Co., 1953; the exterior of the factory in 1951; vintage cookie ad.



Shortbread, and their Samoas are much like ABC's Caramel deLites.

Each baker also claims two signature cookies: ABC produces Thanks-A-Lot and Lemonades; and Little Brownie makes Savannah Smiles and Toffee-tastic.

In honor of the program's centennial, the Girl Scouts have introduced S'Mores, a fudge-dipped graham treat that recalls campfire memories, and is available from both of the bakers.

For many Girl Scout cookie devotees, the different varieties evoke memories of the past—especially for Richmonders who remember the tantalizing smells of cookies baking.

"As you would drive up to the bakery, you could smell, depending upon what items they were cooking that day, caramel, or lemon or peanut butter or chocolate, just emanating from the bakery," says Mary Alice Callaway, vice president of ABC Bakers, recalling the old FFV factory. "The smell of fresh baked cookies in the air—who doesn't love that? And that would waft its way down Boulevard and through the Fan."

Though the Richmond bakery closed in 2006, and ABC Bakers now produces Girl Scout cookies at their factory in North Sioux City, South Dakota, the company maintains a state-of-the-art pilot oven, test kitchen and lab at another factory in Front Royal, where Girl Scout cookies are tested.

"We cycle out new cookies every so often just to generate interest," says Callaway. "Consumer tastes change over time."

Some of the ABC cookies no longer in production include

Strawberries and Creme, Upside Downs, Lemon Chai-Cremes and Iced Berry Piñatas. Past products have included low fat and sugar-free offerings. Today, the cookie line-up includes gluten-free and vegan options, and all are kosher.

Thin Mints, the most popular product, account for about 25 percent of sales, "which is really funny," explains Callaway, "because mint cookies in retail are not as popular, but for the cookie program they are."

Interbake's factory in North Sioux City runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with some machines creating cookies at a pace of 2,800 per minute—or about 4 million per day.

Driving it all is a higher purpose. "Through their participation in the cookie program, our girls develop five key skills—goal setting, decision-making, money management, people skills and business ethics," says Molly Fuller, CEO of the Richmond council. One hundred percent of the net profits from Girl Scouts' cookie sales stay with the local council and troops.

"For 80 years we've been serving Girl Scouts," says Callaway, herself a former scout.

"We really do believe in their mission. Their whole reason for being is to build girls of courage, confidence and character and to make the world a better place."

[GirlScoutCookies.org](http://GirlScoutCookies.org)

Many thanks to Yuki Hibben at VCU Special Collections and Archives, which holds the archive of the Girl Scouts of the Commonwealth of Virginia.



## THE WORLD'S GREATEST COOKIE SALESGIRL

Elizabeth Brinton started out in Brownies as a first grader in Falls Church in 1978. Her mother was a Girl Scout troop leader. "We had a very active troop," she says. "We would go camping all the time." But what really fueled her interest? Cookie sales.

"I was 10 or 11, and they had a contest for the first time, for whoever sold the most cookies. Radio Shack had donated a Tandy home computer," recalls Brinton, now 45. "And I did it. I won the computer. And it was really fun." She sold 11,000 boxes of Girl Scout cookies; two years later, she sold 16,000.

She worked up to 40 hours a week selling cookies, and was the first Girl Scout to pitch her products in a subway station. She recalls, "My first day of setting up a cookie stand in a Metro station, they were gone in two hours." Brinton says she would have fun calling out to passersby. "I would start to memorize the ranks of officers, because if I went to Crystal City, there were a lot of Navy officers walking by. I would be like, 'Commanders love Girl Scout cookies. Bring some cookies to your ship.'"

With the help of U.S. Congressman Frank Wolf, who represented the 10th District, she made it to the Oval Office and met President Ronald Reagan in 1986: "I wanted to know if he was a Thin Mints man or a Samoas Man ... Vice President Bush was a Do-si-do man." Reagan, though, did not reveal his hand. "He very diplomatically bought one box of each."

More goals were set, and Brinton sold 18,000 cookies in a single season—a record that held until 2014. She still holds the record for lifetime sales—100,000. That was her final goal. "Once I hit 100,000, then I took off my cookie coat and said, 'My sales days are over.'" She continued in scouting, eventually achieving a Gold Award, which is similar to becoming an Eagle Scout.

After writing about her sales and sending admissions officers a box of cookies, Brinton attended the University of Pennsylvania. Now a mother of two living in Alabama, she went on to a career in public relations and communications.

"I've always said that the lessons I learned selling Girl Scout cookies served me very well in my adult life," notes Brinton. "This idea of setting goals for yourself, and this confidence that you grow. Young women especially need organizations like the Girl Scouts that give them opportunities to succeed and shine. You carry that with you forever."

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