

The Patriot Ledger

Local celebrities team up with bakery to help send treats to troops

By **Katherine Isbell**

The Patriot Ledger

Posted Nov 30, 2018 at 5:52 PM

QUINCY — Beth Veneto, the owner of Ginger Betty's Bakery, was on a flight to Georgia about 12 years ago when she struck up a conversation with a soldier sitting next to her.

"I was just talking to a gentleman on a plane and I didn't really have anyone in the military, so it put a face to the war," she said. "I got his address, and I sent him and his family cookies when he was on leave."

From there, the G.I. Ginger Betty Foundation was born. Since 2007, the foundation has shipped countless chocolate-drizzled gingersnap cookies to troops overseas.

This year, Veneto decided to do something new to raise money for G.I. Ginger Betty's: a celebrity gingerbread house auction.

More than 15 local celebrities and public figures decorated gingerbread houses baked and assembled by the bakery. The houses were auctioned online over the past week.

Quincy Mayor Thomas Koch decorated a house with a gingerbread man whose face has a picture of the mayor.

Gov. Charlie Baker and Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito topped their house with the State House golden dome, constructed of a drink cup lid and gold-foil-wrapped chocolate coins.

Norfolk County District Attorney Michael Morrissey used a Red Sox theme, decorating his house with baseball Pez dispensers and a Wally the Green Monster toy.

“People got creative. ... You can see each personality,” Veneto said. “Here are these guys that are busy on tour, with their busy schedules, and they made the time to do it.”

Houses were decorated by Paul Wahlberg of Wahlburgers, Marylou Sandry of Marylou’s Coffee and Ken Casey of the Dropkick Murphys.

Casey, whose house was decorated in colors of the Irish flag, is giving one of the band’s Christmas sweaters to the winner, Veneto said.

Marina Bay’s Victory Point restaurant is including a gift card with its gingerbread house and the governor’s office has promised a couple of bonus items as well.

The money raised from the auction will be used to send more cookies to troops overseas. Hundreds of gingersnaps are shipped out every couple of months. The foundation also sends cookies and gingerbread houses to military families in the states.

The work that G.I. Ginger Betty’s does has not gone unnoticed.

In 2009, the foundation received the Seven Seals Award from the U.S. Department of Defense Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. The organization works to create and promote supportive work environments for

members of the military, and the Seven Seals Award recognizes individuals and organizations whose work supports this mission.

Veneto said service members returning from deployment often visit the bakery to thank staff for sending them cookies.

“We get letters, we get phone calls and thank-yous. When they come home from overseas, we get soldiers coming in,” Veneto said. “You think it’s a simple thing like a cookie, but it means so much. ... They’re so appreciative.”

She said one soldier who came in to say thank you told staff he was ecstatic to receive something familiar while he was far from home.

“He said, ‘I saw the boxes and knew it was Ginger Betty’s,’ ” Veneto said.

Walls at the Samoset Avenue bakery are decorated with photos of service members in Iraq, Afghanistan, South Korea and other overseas locations enjoying their cookies.

A photo book made by serviceman Ryan Hanrahan of Hingham is displayed at the front of the store. It is filled with photos of service members receiving and unwrapping the packages from Ginger Betty’s.

G.I. Ginger Betty’s also works with local schoolchildren to package the cookies and write letters to members of the military. Veneto said visits to schools including the Pingree Primary School in Weymouth help children better grasp the importance of supporting the troops. Hanrahan’s photo book, she explained, is also a good tool to show children where their letters and the cookies are going.

“By the time we leave, they really understand and they get it,” she said.

Veneto said G.I. Ginger Betty’s is simply a way to help those who serve the nation.

“It’s the least we can do,” Veneto said. “We’re just trying to do our part. We’re not skipping a beat over here and they’re fighting for us over there.”