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Thanks to one Scout, troops get sweet deal

By **CINDY SWIRKO**

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By the numbers

- Girl Scouts in Alachua County: 2,038
- Total cookie sales in Alachua County so far this year: 112,200 boxes
- Total cookie sales in Alachua County last year: 108,972 boxes
- Most popular cookies purchased in Alachua County: Thin Mints, then Samoas and then Tagalongs

Like thousands of other Girl Scouts nationwide, Taylor Johnson decided to hit up her mom's co-workers to buy some cookies.

But when Taylor wrote a letter to the head of that company - Tower Hill Insurance Group - she had absolutely no idea it would make her the biggest cookie seller in the region.

Taylor sold \$10,000 worth of cookies - 2,857 boxes - to the company. All of the cookies will go to American troops in the Iraq War.

"I expected it to be a lot less than that. I was very surprised," said Taylor, who is in her fifth year of scouting. "I normally sell about 200 to 300 boxes. I'm very thankful to Tower Hill for helping."

Taylor, the 9-year-old daughter of Jane and Lee Johnson, also sold cookies in her neighborhood, at a storefront booth and through her parents.

Tia Ford, spokeswoman for Girl Scouts of Gateway Council - the 16-county regional organization - said Taylor's sale is a major accomplishment.



Taylor Johnson, a 9-year-old Girl Scout, sold \$10,000 worth of cookies to Tower Hill Insurance, where her mother Jane works, to send to troops overseas. Shown here Tuesday at her northwest Gainesville home, Taylor holds up a thank you card from herself and Girl Scout Troop (Doug Finger/The Gainesville Sun)

On average, a troop sells 2,300 boxes, Ford said. A one-time sale of \$10,000 is a first in the Gateway Council. It is also unusual on a national scale, she added.

"For her to sell \$10,000 worth is huge. It's highly unprecedented," Ford said.

The cookie sale is an annual Girl Scouts fundraiser and it continues through Sunday. Anyone who hasn't gotten enough cookies at work or from door-to-door salesgirls can get their fix from Scouts selling the cookies in front of area stores.

Ford added that some Scouts will have leftover boxes and will continue selling them until they run out.

Tower Hill President Don Matz said the company had mailed about 500 care packages to overseas troops at Christmas. He said the cookie purchase was a continuation of that effort.

"They will go to soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. We tend to donate to charitable causes where our employees or family members are directly involved - something they have a passion for," Matz said. "We thought it was a good thing to do and a follow-up from our holiday giving."

The Girl Scouts have joined with the USO - or United Service Organizations - to create the Cookies From Home program.

Cookies bought under the program are shipped directly overseas to the troops.

Scouts first began selling cookies around 1917, baking the treats themselves.

In 1936, the national Girl Scout organization began the process to license the first commercial baker to mass produce Girl Scout cookies.

Now, about 200 million boxes are sold yearly with \$700 million in sales. It's an activity that Taylor enjoys.

"It's fun going around to peoples' houses, to my neighbors and selling the cookies - not that you should go all over the place," Taylor said.

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