

Girl Scouts cookie season gets underway

Georgann Yara
Special to Arizona Republic
USA TODAY NETWORK

Hey Arizona, the 2019 Girl Scouts cookie season is finally underway.

While there are eight flavors in the arsenal, the Thin Mint is the perennial go-to choice, accounting for about a quarter of cookie sales each year. The second most popular cookie: the Samoa's caramel-and-coconut duo.

Girl Scout cookie fans will be busy procuring their year's supply as the Girl Scout Cookie Program for the Arizona Cactus-Pine Council runs from Jan. 21 to March 3. More than 11,000 Girl Scouts in central and northern Arizona will be in full force selling their wares — setting shop in front of stores, knocking on neighbors' doors and conducting online sales.

Last year, the council sold 2.9 million packages of cookies. This year's goal is 3 million.

After a century of annual sales and heavy competition from year-round alternatives, how has the Girl Scout cookie allure remained?

"The good flavors, especially with the Thin Mints and Samoa, people look forward to them. It's that once-a-year treat that's not going to be around forever," said Heather Thornton, communications manager for the council.

8 types of cookies

For those who need a refresher, the lineup consists of:

■ **Thin Mints:** Mint-flavored vegan cookies covered in chocolate.

■ **Tagalongs:** Layers of peanut butter with a chocolaty coating.

■ **Samoas:** Caramel and toasted coconut-covered.

■ **Trefoils:** Shortbread.

■ **Do-si-dos:** Crisp and crunchy oatmeal outside and creamy peanut butter inside.

■ **Savannah Smiles:** Lemon cookies dusted with powdered sugar.

■ **Girl Scout S'mores:** Graham sandwich cookies with chocolate and marshmallow filling.

■ **Toffee-tastics:** Buttery gluten-free cookies with crunchy golden toffee bits.

Each box is \$5, with the exception of the S'mores and Toffee-tastics, which are \$6.



Selling in front of local businesses, known as "boothing," has been very popular.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GIRL SCOUTS ARIZONA CACTUS-PINE COUNCIL

The new Caramel Chocolate Chip, a gluten-free cookie, will not be available in Arizona.

How to get cookies

Over the years, "boothing" — setting up pop-ups in front of partnering businesses — has proven the most successful method, helping Scouts to sell the most cookies in the shortest amount of time. Last year, this partnership created more than 22,000 booths.

Most recently, online platforms also have proven lucrative. The Cookie Finder app — girlscoutsaz.org/cookiefinder — helps users find booths in or closest to their ZIP code. The app allows Scouts to run their own small business by building their own website and managing their sales. It also gives them a safe online space to interact with customers they know, and the mobile version lets them accept mobile payments.

"The girls are connecting online while learning e-commerce and learning valuable business skills," Thornton said.



This year, the Girl Scouts' Walkabout campaign encourages girls, accompanied by an adult, to walk their neighborhoods and sell door-to-door.

However, the Walkabout campaign brings the sales program full circle. This year, Scouts are encouraged to walk their neighborhoods with an adult supervisor and visit former, current and potential new cookie customers. It gives girls the opportunity to practice their own sales pitches as an independent seller. Scouts and customers who

upload a photo to stories@girlscoutsaz.org of a Walkabout transaction can win a gift card to one of the restaurants participating in the Girl Scout Dessert Challenge.

"There is a new segment of customers preferring to get groceries delivered to them. We're encouraging Girl Scouts to look at their strategy and where it makes sense to do more walkabouts. It's neat to see that communication shift and expand," Thornton said.

Girl Scout Dessert Challenge

A number of local restaurants will participate in the sixth annual Girl Scout Dessert Challenge using the flavor of choice as the inspiration. The desserts will be sold throughout February, with the winner decided by fan vote at girlscoutsaz.org/dessert-challenge. Proceeds will benefit the Scouts.

This year, Kellie Pruitt, owner of PNPK Craft Slider + Wine Bar at Scottsdale Airpark, will serve a dessert trio featuring the Do-Si-Dos. The Flight of Delight (\$8) flaunts mini-versions of chocolate peanut butter cheesecake, a PB&J pie and peanut butter banana pudding.

"Being from Texas, banana pudding is a staple, so I really wanted to do a pudding," said Pruitt, a police officer turned finance officer turned restaurateur.

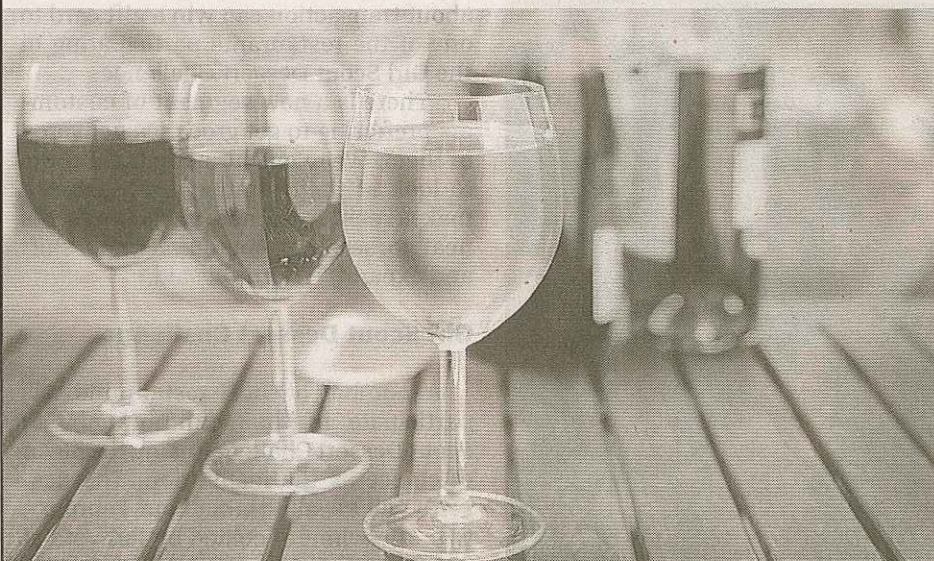
Her favorite Girl Scout cookie flavor is the Samoa, but she opts for the peanut-butter cookie for its versatility. Used to careers in male-dominated industries, Pruitt views her involvement with the Girl Scouts as an opportunity to be a role model.

"I want to show them that you can do anything if you put your mind to it. I want to help mentor girls so they can have the opportunities like I had," she said.

Along with PNPK, other restaurants taking on the challenge include The Thumb, Rusconi's American Kitchen, Aioli Burger, 32 Shea, ZuZu at Hotel Valley Ho, Ocean Prime, The Herb Box, Proof Canteen at the Four Seasons Scottsdale, Phoenix Ale Brewery Central Kitchen, Silver Pine Restaurant at Little America Hotel, Jake's Unlimited, Original Gravity and Babbo Italian Eat-

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The Flight of Delight by PNPk Craft Slider + Wine Bar is the restaurant's entry in this year's Girl Scout Dessert Challenge. PNPk CRAFT SLIDER + WINE BAR

Scouts

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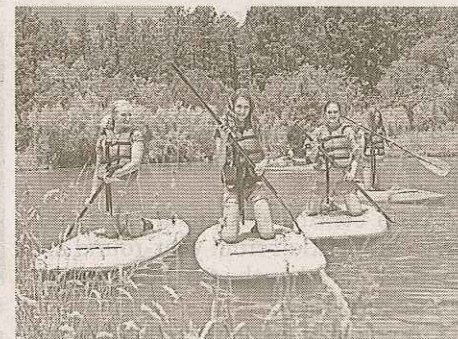
ery.

All proceeds purchased through the council stay in Arizona, Thornton said, funding troop trips, community service projects, STEM programs and other leadership activities.

Adding garden boxes to schools and donating \$500 to Camp at South Mountain are among the ways girls plan to invest sales revenue this year.

"They really think not only about what they want to do with their money, but how they can do better for their community with their proceeds. And they're deciding this on their own," Thornton said.

Cactus-Pine is one of two Girl Scout councils in the state. The other, South-



Proceeds from Girl Scout cookie sales benefit a variety of leadership programs and activities. GIRL SCOUTS ARIZONA CACTUS-PINE COUNCIL

ern Arizona, includes Tucson and Yuma, and its cookie season also runs through March 3.

Details: girlscoutsaz.org.

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