



E. Joseph Deering / Chronicle

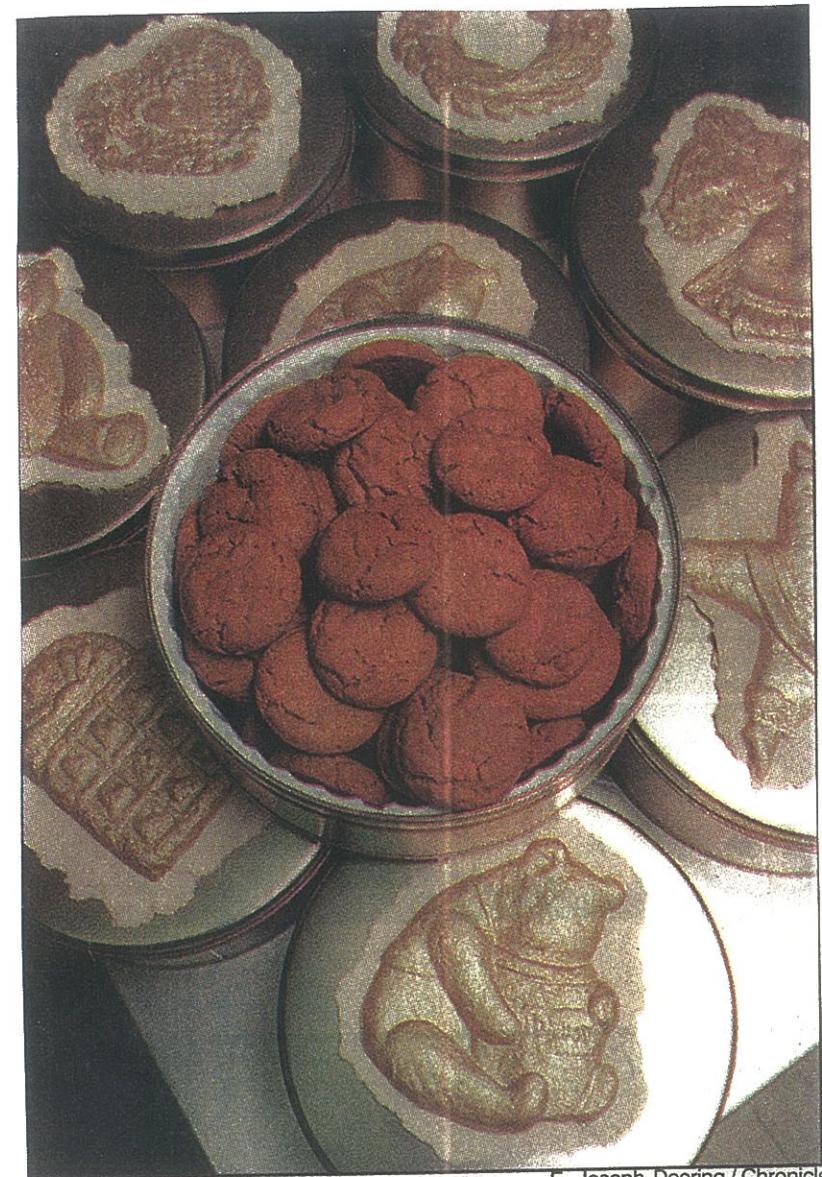
Willow River residents decorate the tins with gilded handmade paper ornaments — four different angels, four hearts, a Christmas tree, a wreath, Christmas stockings and two teddy bears. Hanukkah tins are silver and are decorated with handmade silver ornaments. Each tin includes a card with the name of the resident who decorated it. Volunteers donate their services, but artisans are paid for their work.

Volunteers gather in the commercial kitchen of Diet Gourmet, 3435 Westheimer, to make the cookies. The tins are available in two sizes: The smaller is \$15 plus \$4 shipping and handling; the large size, \$25 plus \$5 shipping and handling. For more information and pictures, access the Web site, www.gingersnaps.org. Or call 713-525-8468. Fax orders to 713-525-8465.

Willow River volunteers make two types of fruitcake: a traditional loaf filled with red and green cherries, dates, walnuts and coconut; and Brandied Fruit and Nut Cake. It contains no cherries but is chock-full of dried fruit and nuts; it is aged with brandy.

The cakes come gift-wrapped in 1-pound (\$10 plus \$4 shipping), 2-pound (\$18 plus \$5 shipping) and 3-pound (\$27 plus \$6 shipping) sizes. Check them out on the Web site at www.fruitcakes.org, or call 713-525-8468. Fax orders to 713-525-8465. Deadline for Christmas orders is Dec. 15.

Willow River Farms is a nonprofit facility that includes an organic farm and an artisan community. Profits from the cookies and cakes go to special projects of the farms.



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Residents of Willow River Farms make the paper used in decorations on gingersnap-cookie tins. A card in each tin identifies the resident.

Volunteers from Willow River Farms gather in the commercial kitchen of Diet Gourmet to make gingersnap cookies for their holiday sale. Cookie makers, from left, are Lois McConnell, Alicia Lee and Joy Kaplan.

While others are out scurrying for gifts, use computer to do holiday shopping

ANN CRISWELL
Houston Chronicle Food Editor

A la Carte

INTERNET sites offer opportunities for carefree holiday shopping this year, in addition to the new gourmet food catalogs.

One of the newest Web sites in Houston is Willow River Farms, part of the Center for the Retarded Inc., where volunteers have added gingersnaps to the center's holiday offering of fruitcakes.

You can thank former first lady Barbara Bush for the addition of the crispy, crunchy, spicy cookies to their repertoire of goodies by mail.

Longtime volunteer Alicia Lee got the fruitcake project started, but one day Bush was visiting her husband's

office, where Lee also is a volunteer. Bush suggested that Willow River sell gingersnaps, which she really likes, as well as fruitcake.

Volunteers spent months testing gingersnap recipes. By last holiday season, they had perfected the recipe and found a company in Wisconsin that had just the right blend of fresh spices.

Without any help, they sold 200 tins to customers who discovered the delights of eating the cookies plain or dunking them in coffee and milk.