

This Week

EDIBLE DELIGHTS



Kim Christensen photos

Harriet Kahn, left, and Ebba Smith glue decorative tops onto tins of gingersnaps, fruitcakes and cheese snaps before they're packed for shipping. Proceeds will benefit the Center Serving Persons with Mental Retardation.

The Center filling orders for holiday goodies

By **DAPHNE ROZEN**
Chronicle correspondent

THIS holiday season is already off to a sweet start as many dedicated volunteers at The Center Serving Persons with Mental Retardation, near San Felipe, are busy baking their usual thousands of gingersnaps, fruitcakes and cheesesnaps for distribution both near and far.

"We work day and night to fill the huge amount of orders that are flowing into our office," said Alicia Lee, volunteer coordinator of the gingersnap program. "We have people ordering our delicious cookies from all over the country and we are shipping to lands as far away as New Zealand."

The gingersnap program was founded in 1998 at the request of former First Lady Barbara Bush, who told Lee she preferred the taste of gingersnaps to fruitcakes.

"Because this seems to be the opinion many people have

TEMPTING TASTES

Gingersnaps: \$25 for 23 oz.; \$16 for 16 oz.

Traditional and branched fruit and nut fruitcakes: \$18 for a 2-lb. cake; \$27 for a 3-lb. cake.

Cheesesnaps: \$15 for 8 oz.; \$30 for 1 lb.

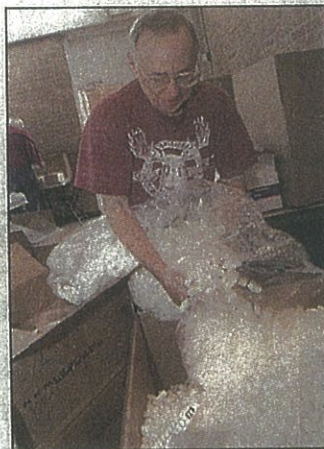
Shipping costs are additional.

To order: Call 713-525-8468 or toll-free 1-800-939-3720, or visit www.gingersnaps.org.

toward fruitcakes, even though most people have never tried our wonderful fruitcakes, we began the gingersnap program to satisfy all types of palates," Lee said.

All the edible delights, which are made using Lee's 40-year-old family recipes, may be found at all Whole Foods Market locations, or may be purchased online at the center's Web site.

While some volunteers will be designated bakers for the approximately 245,000 gingersnaps, others — including



B.Z. Lee, below, pours packing peanuts over tins.

residents of Willow River Farms, a division of the center that provides a living and work facility for adults ages 18 and above with developmental disabilities — will be in charge of decorating the 7,000 gingersnap cookie tins with their handmade art paper.

"I can't tell you (enough about) what it does for their self-esteem to have a job no

matter how menial the job is," said Lee's husband, Bernard, referring to their son, Jeffrey, a long-time Willow River Farms resident who participates in the gingersnap program every season.

In addition to gingersnaps, Willow River Farms residents also create and sell signed ceramic ware, woven placemats and rugs, and hand-dipped candles through the center's artisan program.

Proceeds from all sales benefit the lives of all Willow River Farms residents. Alicia and Bernard said prior proceeds have provided a wheelchair-assisted bus and van, lifting equipment for the medical facilities, farm equipment and more than \$175,000 in scholarships for residents in need of financial assistance.

"The more we sell, the more we give," Alicia said. "There's a lot of things that would enhance the lives of the residents that don't fit into the budget and that's where the gingersnap (and artisan) program fits in."