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PAGE 1F

## JOY *to the* WORLD



Steen has four kinds of oatmeal cookie mix: Oatmeal-Pecan, Oatmeal-Chocolate Chip-Pecan, Oatmeal-Chocolate Chip-Coconut and Oatmeal-Raisin-Cranberry-Pecan.

### Oatmeal cookie mix-in-a-jar is a gift of love

BY KAREN HARAM  
EXPRESS-NEWS FOOD EDITOR

Sandra Steen's oatmeal cookies may be eaten by everyone from Hollywood celebrities to regular San Antonians, but she's emphatic about one thing.

"I'm not in the cookie business. I'm in the joy business," she says.

That may be true, but Steen is selling some mighty tasty oatmeal cookies in the process of spreading all that joy.

Steen, a motivational speaker and founder and president of Sandra Steen & Associates Inc., an international training and consulting firm, calls her gourmet oatmeal cookie-mix venture Ms. Steen's Oats to Joy. The name reflects her mission to spread joy wherever she goes.

"Joy is a spiritual advantage that lifts you, sustains you and brings increase into your life and the lives of those connected to you," she says.

Before the idea of her



PHOTOS BY ROBERT MCCLEROY/STAFF

Sandra Steen is a successful motivational speaker who started baking oatmeal cookies five years ago as gifts for family and friends. She now packages and sells her own cookie mix that people can make at home.

cookie business was born, Steen started spreading joy into the lives of her family and friends with the oatmeal cookies she gave as gifts — gifts from the heart, she calls them.

She started baking cookies five or so years ago, when, during the Christmas holidays, Steen decided she wanted to do something special for her friends and family — something no one would expect a busy executive to do.

"I started playing with this recipe for oatmeal cookies," she says.

Though she didn't bake often, when Steen did bake, it was always and only oatmeal cookies — no chocolate chip or sugar cookies for her.

"My whole deal is oatmeal," she says. "I love oatmeal in a bowl and I always wanted to find a way to take a bowl of oatmeal and bake it."

Early attempts resulted in cookies that were too sweet.

Others were too soft, too bland or too smooth. Steen likes a crisp, rustic oatmeal cookie, she explains, and it took a while to get it right.

As she perfected her recipe, Steen started sending the cookies to clients, friends and family.

"People would go crazy. I would package them differently each time," she says, and recipients couldn't wait to get them. "Everyone told me the cookies tasted like pure joy."

Among those recipients were Frank E. and P. Bunny Wilson, longtime friends of Steen who live in Hollywood and conduct marriage and family seminars throughout the country. Bunny is an author; Frank is a songwriter/record producer who has written hits such as "I'm Gonna Make You Love Me," "Love Child" and "You Made Me So Very Happy."

While everyone loved her cookies, "Frank's a real cookie monster. He'd take the cookies and hide them. His wife said she'd never seen her husband this way about food," she says.

So popular were her cookies with Frank that Steen

SEE PAGE 2

# Oatmeal cookie mix is one woman's Oats to Joy

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

started making up packages of the cookie ingredients to take to California with her, where she'd mix them up and bake them off.

"Then Frank was really excited. He'd never had the cookies out of the oven," she says.

Not only was Frank excited, so were the couple's four daughters. "What Bunny noticed was that when the aroma filled the house, everyone started gathering around the kitchen," Steen says.

As she explains it, this is a busy, high profile family. The Wilsons putting movies on to watch while they waited for cookies to bake was a noteworthy affair.

"Bunny told me, 'I make all these big meals and people just keep going. You bake a cookie and everything stops. You've got to do something,'" Steen says. "She nudged me because of what she saw the cookies doing to her family." Steen recalls telling Bunny, "I'm not a cook. I just love oatmeal cookies."

That's when Bunny, a great cook herself, suggested Steen look at the project in a new way.

Approaching the project differently meant considering the cookies as more than just, well, cookies. Things started falling into place when Steen thought about selling cookie mix, rather than prepared cookies, and calling it Joy in a Jar to tie in with a book she was writing, "Who Stole My Joy?" which will be released early next year.

In the book, Steen tells the story of "Joy," who, in his search for happiness, meets joy robbers and joy

## Ms. Steen's Recipe for Joy

■ **Preparation:** Find a bowl made of love. Preheat your spirit with faith and hope.

■ **Add:** 2 cups of positive attitude.

■ **Sift for joy robbers:** Fear, low self-esteem, anger, resentment and rejection.

■ **Pour:** 1 full cup of vision. Should be clear of any loose

particles, like jealousy, envy.

■ **Blend:** 2 heaping tablespoons of celebration and humor.

■ **Mix:** Stir the ingredients together with purpose.

■ **Yield:** A spiritual advantage that lifts you, sustains you, and brings you and those connected to you to a place of increase.



Apple juice, butter and vanilla are added to Steen's oatmeal cookie mix.

enhancers. We've all met those people who do their best to try to rob you of your joy in life, Steen explains.

When Joy meets a character called Celebration, Joy asks him to share a small pleasure, a fabulous oatmeal cookie.

"It's the everyday simple pleasures that are in themselves cause to celebrate," Steen says. "It's hard to think of a celebration that doesn't come with food."

As Steen did her homework and talked to food experts and technicians, she changed the working name of her cookie mix, settling on Oats to Joy, a play on Ludwig van Beethoven's glorious "Ode to Joy."

She also changed the recipe to one that was less sweet, and "took out butter and took out butter" until she couldn't take out any more.

"I want flavor, not fat. You still get the flavor of the but-



Sandra Steen is the author of 'Who Stole My Joy.'

ter." She also tested everything from milk to orange juice to see what liquid worked best with the mix, settling on apple juice as her favorite.

For packaging, she opted for a Mason jar and fresh, upscale colors on the label to "combine the best of the old with the new," she says.

Steen's cookies come in four varieties: Oatmeal-Pecan, Oatmeal-Chocolate Chip-Pecan, Oatmeal-Chocolate Chip-Coconut and Oatmeal-Raisin-Cranberry-Pecan. Steen's favorite was the cranberry at first. "Now I'm attached to the chocolate-coconut," she says.

The mix is combined with butter and apple juice and while there's no way to consider it low fat or low-calorie, as cookies go, it's relatively healthful.

Steen started selling her cookie mix in August.

It sells for \$18 a jar, makes 2½-3 dozen cookies, and is

available at Dillard's, Bering's and HoneyBaked Ham. Steen grew up in San Antonio, graduating from Brackenridge High School before attending Southern Methodist University.

Her career took her to Kansas City and Atlanta before she moved back to San Antonio.

Steen's cooking expertise served her well while she was in college. She talked her dorm resident adviser into letting her use the kitchen, and she made enchiladas, beans and rice, which she sold to fellow students.

They were so enamored of her cooking that they stood in long lines to buy dinner. "I was trying to pay my way through a very expensive school," she recalls.

Steen says she's not an accomplished cook — though her co-workers call her one of the best cooks they know — but she admits she has "a great palate. I do know flavor. I know how to mix flavors together."

Her culinary skill came from her grandmother, Nora Mae Polk, who raised Steen and was a "great influence" on her life. "My grandmother was a great cook. She never used anything bottled."

She's not surprised at the impact her cookies and baking have had on others. "Food is tied to the most important events of life," she says.

When Steen branches beyond oatmeal cookies, she does most of her cooking with recipes from her friend Bunny's book, "God Is in the Kitchen Too." Since her oatmeal cookie recipe is a well-kept secret, she shares some of her favorites from Bunny.