

# Making Mmm...merry

Time to sugar and spice up the season.

By **Sonja Stromswold**  
MOHALL, NORTH DAKOTA



PHOTOS: MARK STROMSWOLD



**W**hen I wish people “Merry Christmas” from my home state of North Dakota, I say it sweetly—with recipes for treats that have been in my family for generations.

In my business, Sonja’s Old-Fashioned Delicacies, I make cookies, candies and desserts, including many my mother, grandmas and great-grandmother used to bake. All my products are homemade in small batches, so they taste like the goodies I remember eating as a kid.

This all started 20 years ago when, to earn extra Christmas money, I began baking a few sweets to sell at local craft shows. My business remained on a small scale until 2005. That year, my husband, Mark, helped me remodel a building on our farm into a commercial kitchen.

Our ovens really heat up during the holiday season. My heritage is Norwegian, and we get tons of orders for Scandinavian cookies, like krumkake, rosettes, sandbakkels and fattigmand (delicately deep-fried cookies), plus julekake, or fruitcake. Among our candies, my grandma’s caramels are most popular, followed closely by toffee-coated brittle, almond butter crunch, divinity and fudge.

The rest of the year, I keep busy making everyday pastries and desserts for special occasions. Customers are partial to my

home-style cookies, especially chocolate chip, sugar, molasses, oatmeal raisin and peanut butter. We also keep a

growing list of layer cakes, tarts and cheesecakes on the menu.

About a year ago, we launched a Web site that’s brought orders from across the country. We ship anything, except for fragile or refrigerated items, almost anywhere in the world.

I’m also a member of Pride of North Dakota, an organization that promotes state products and businesses. Through them, we exhibit at holiday shows, selling and sharing samples. Our best advertising is the kind you can eat!

## Baking Blitz

When we’re in full swing for the holidays,

I put in 12- to 18-hour days in my commercial kitchen, up to 7 days a week. It’s equipped with two heavy-duty mixers, two industrial ovens and wall shelves filled with the best nuts, chocolate, dried fruit, spices and staples I can find. That includes our own state-milled Dakota Maid Flour and plenty of sugar from our Red River Valley sugar beet farms.

When I’m in a crunch, Mark pitches in with cookie and candy production. We make a great team in the kitchen. Meantime, my mother, Judy Duerre, and some friends help with packaging and wrapping. We put everything in colorful packages tied with ribbons so our goodies



**Baker’s dozens** of Sonja Stromswold’s treats cater to holiday taste buds. **1. & 2.** She sweetens the season with delicious cookies, candies, tarts and cakes. **3. & 4.** Desserts, homemade in her commercial kitchen, are temptingly displayed at Midwestern food and gift shows.

look like presents. Recently, we’ve been making tasty assortments for businesses to give their customers as gifts.

In my spare time, I teach a few baking classes to the public at a nearby culinary store. The one I present on holiday desserts usually attracts a full house. I stress to my students that you don’t need expensive or exotic ingredients to get mouthwatering results.

Instead, it’s the simple, sugar-and-spice aromas and tastes that trigger memories of wonderful Christmases of the past. And it’s those heirloom recipes passed down from great-grandma that delight our hearts and taste buds. 🍪

**Editor’s Note:** To contact Sonja and order her delicacies, call 1-701/756-6441. You can also go to her Web site through ours, clicking “Links.”

## From Sonja’s Kitchen Cutout Sugar Cookies

*“As a girl, I helped Mom make these crunchy cutout cookies. Iced and sprinkled with colored sugar, they’re the best!”*

1/2 cup butter, softened

1/2 cup shortening

1 cup sugar

2 eggs

1 Tbsp. milk

1 tsp. vanilla extract

4 cups all-purpose flour

1 tsp. baking soda

1/4 tsp. salt

### FROSTING:

1/2 cup butter, softened

4 cups confectioners’ sugar

1 tsp. vanilla extract

2 to 4 Tbsp. half-and-half cream

Food coloring, colored sugar and decorating candies, optional

**1.** In a large bowl, cream the butter, shortening and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the egg, milk and vanilla. Combine the flour, baking soda and salt; add to creamed mixture and mix well.

**2.** Divide dough into three balls; cover and refrigerate for 1 hour or until easy to handle.

**3.** Remove one portion of dough from the refrigerator at a time. On a lightly floured surface, roll out dough to 1/4-in. thickness. Cut with a floured 2-in. cookie cutter. Place 1 in. apart on ungreased baking sheets.

**4.** Bake at 325° for 8-10 minutes or until edges are lightly browned. Cool for 1 minute before removing to wire racks to cool completely.

**5.** For frosting, in a large bowl, cream the butter, confectioners’ sugar, vanilla and enough cream to achieve spreading consistency. Tint with food coloring if desired. Frost cookies. Decorate with colored sugar and candies if desired. **Yield:** 6 dozen.

**Nutrition Facts:** 1 cookie equals 99 calories, 4 g fat (2 g saturated fat), 13 mg cholesterol, 46 mg sodium, 15 g carbohydrate, trace fiber, 1 g protein. **Diabetic Exchanges:** 1 starch, 1/2 fat.



## Warm Memories of a Frosty Cookie Party

Neither rain, nor sleet, nor loss of power could crumble this spirited Christmas cookie party.

“For the past 10 years, my neighbor, Susie Edberg (photo below), and I have baked multiple dozens of sugar cookies and invited a new batch of friends to decorate them,” explains Linda Jark/Stoffer of Chapman, Kansas (photo above, on left). Last December, though, a huge ice storm left many people in the state without electricity for days, reliant on emergency generators.

Guests wondered if the cookie party was still on. “We told them, ‘Sure—just dress warm and bring your gloves,’” Linda recalls, adding that the cookies had already been baked.

In true pioneer style, the hostesses carried on. “We heated cider on the propane stove and dusted off my grandma’s kerosene lantern and several candles to improve the lighting,” Linda says.

“Our guests arrived, clad in thermal underwear, earmuffs and cozy Christmas sweaters. We huddled around a table in the warmest part of my house to frost, sprinkle and nibble.

“With all our laughter, stories and hot cider toasts, it felt like our glazed-over world was finally thawing. We were having such a good time, it was hard to say good-bye...until we ran out of daylight. Everyone wrapped up a cookie platter for their families and headed home.

“Some of us stayed without power for 2 weeks or more. But the warm friendship we shared at our cookie party was a bright spot we’ll always remember.” 🍪

