

Earn Your Stripes

Feeling patriotic this Fourth of July? Follow the lead of these four entrepreneurs who've built businesses that help soldiers overseas and let the troops know how much they're appreciated.

COMPANY: Treats for Troops, a company that sends care packages to soldiers, in Englewood, Colorado **FOUNDER:** Deborah Crane **STARTED:** 2003 **2007 SALES:** About \$1 million **HOW SHE HELPS:** As a military mother, Crane has a lot of experience sending care packages overseas. Knowing the challenges friends and family face in navigating the security regulations to send care packages, especially since 9/11, she started Treats for Troops (treatsfortroops.com) to simplify the process. To order, customers only need to know a soldier's name and active duty address. Or customers can participate in the Foster-A-Soldier program, which allows anyone to securely buy a gift basket for a registered soldier with everything from snacks and treats to necessities such as toothbrushes and prepaid phone cards. Crane is inspired by the servicepeople coming in from guard duty or returning from a four-day mission. "I want those [soldiers] to have something at mail call," says Crane. "I wish everyone could have a package or letter, at minimum, every week."

COMPANY: TakePride, a military-inspired T-shirt manufacturer in New York City **FOUNDERS:** Patrick Gray and John Betz, both 33 **STARTED:** 2006 **2007 SALES:** Six figures **HOW THEY HELP:** Gray and Betz (a third-generation Marine) wanted to provide an apolitical way for people to stylishly show support for the troops and came up with T-shirts designed to convey a U.S. soldier's experience in Iraq or Afghanistan. Says Gray, "Our idea was to create a symbol that people were comfortable wearing that also communicated a message of being concerned." Culling stories from their network of military contacts, the pair aims to get their unique shirts into several national retailers. The T-shirts are currently sold online at takepride.com. Betz and Gray also donate at least 20 percent of profits to the Wounded Warrior Project charity.

COMPANY: Bake Me A Wish!, a gourmet cake delivery company in New York City **FOUNDER:** Josh Kaye **STARTED:** 2004 **2007 SALES:** \$4 million **HOW HE HELPS:** Kaye started Operation: Birthday Cake, allowing customers to order cakes in decadent flavors like Cookies and Cream Oreos or Double Fudge Crunch to be delivered to soldiers on their birthdays. The company has also linked up with the Armed Forces Foundation and Soldiers' Angels to donate birthday cakes to service members overseas. "On their birthdays, [soldiers] can feel very detached," says Kaye, who recalls a moving thank-you letter a soldier wrote him after receiving a cake for his birthday—the second year he'd spent it in Afghanistan.

—NICHOLE L. TORRES



Patrick Gray (l.) and John Betz's shirts send a positive message about U.S. troops.