

# Girl Scouts troops with lucky lottery spots crumble competition by selling at MBTA stations

By **Sonel Cutler** Globe Correspondent, Updated March 10, 2023, 6:21 p.m.



Morgan Stark, 11, left, and Phoebe Scott, 11, center rear, help commuter customers buy cookies at the Ruggles MBTA station. The two girls are members of Girl Scout Cadette Troop 70040, which brought brought 60 cases (720 boxes of Girl Scout cookies) with them. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

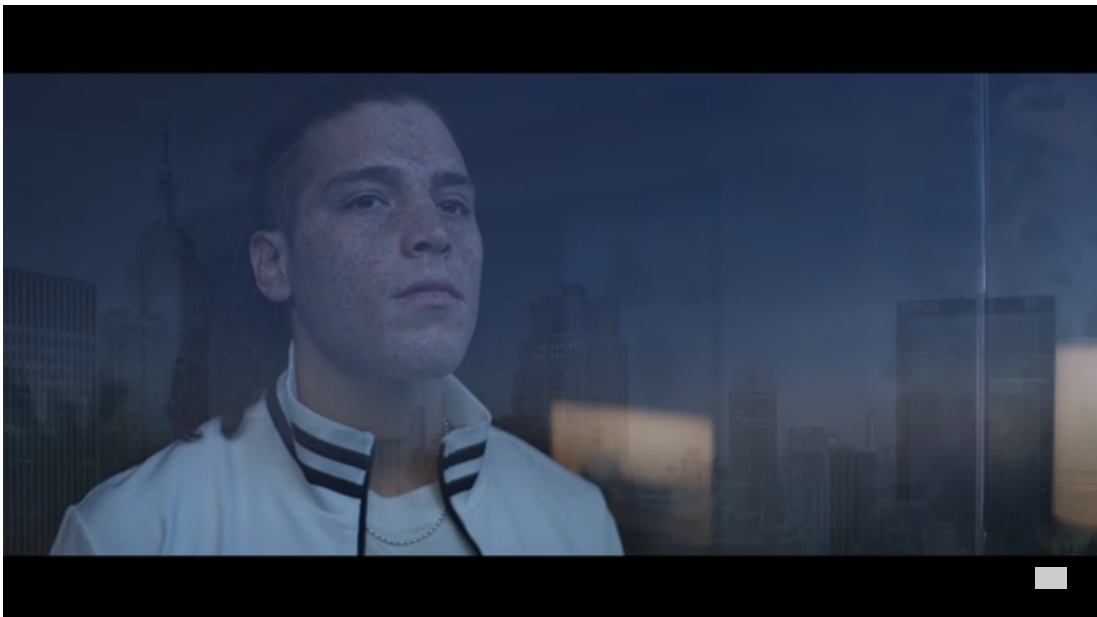
As a throng of commuters filed out of the MBTA fare gates at Copley station during rush hour one recent evening, a colorful table piled high with Peanut Butter Patties and Caramel deLites greeted them. The booth, flanked by two Girl Scouts and two adults from Maynard Troop 67540, was soon swarmed by buyers who forked over \$5 bills and

showed Venmo transfer confirmations to take home a box (or more) of the world-famous cookies sold by troops each year between December and March.

Selling in a small community like Maynard is “not as rigorous,” said Jennifer Ramirez, who leads the troop and traveled more than 25 miles to sell at the MBTA. “It’s good for the little ones to learn by going into Boston. It’s a lot of work for us troop leaders ... [but] it’s more lucrative for us.”

But with about 1,800 troops in Eastern Massachusetts and only 18 designated sales booths at MBTA stations, securing such a sweet spot is no slam dunk. It comes down to a little-known lottery process in which the toughest cookies vie for high-selling booths at T stations, where troops can sell hundreds of boxes in a single 2½-hour sale period.

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As selling season came to a close on Friday, troop leaders and Girl Scouts offered a peek into the hustle to sell the most cookies and earn money to fund group trips and community projects.

Phoebe Scott, 11 and from Dorchester, said sales go a long way in helping her troop save money for camping and tree-climbing trips, although it can be overwhelming to sell at busy MBTA stations.

“We have to be rushing and it’s hard if people are waiting for the train,” she said, but ultimately it’s worth the extra dough. “It’s a lot more busy than going to a grocery store or near your house. ... The only part I don’t like is the pigeon poop.”



Phoebe Scott, an 11-year-old Scout from Dorchester, said sales go a long way in helping her troop save money for camping and tree-climbing trips. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

When the lottery opens at 9 a.m. during the first week of December, Ramirez is one of the first people on the request form to enter her troop’s favored locations in hopes of getting first dibs on an MBTA booth slot.

“There are certain stations that are more profitable for us that we all tried to target,” Ramirez said, with Ruggles, Copley, Kenmore, and Harvard among the most desirable. Often, time slots for the first day of cookie sales at those locations will fill up by the second day of signups, she said.

At Copley station, Ramirez's troop sold more than \$1,500 worth of cookies within one sale period.

Though troops in Eastern Massachusetts can milk more out of MBTA stations than other booth locations, such as malls and other suburban areas, there is a debate over whether entering the lottery early actually helps tip the scales. The official Girls Scouts position is that as long as troop leaders enter the lottery during the week it's open, everyone has an equal chance to score an MBTA booth.

"We put [MBTA booths] into a lottery system because they're very popular, everybody wants them," said Erin Sullivan, senior director of product programs and retail at the Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts, or GSEMA. "Whether you enter the first day of December, the last day before the lottery closes, it doesn't matter. It's completely random."

GSEMA troop leaders have two opportunities to enter the lottery — one in December for January booths and one in January for February and March booths. The lottery, run through a specialized database called [Smart Cookies](#), also provides average cookie sales at each location.

Harvard, Copley, Back Bay, and Ruggles are the top-selling MBTA locations, each selling boxes reaching into the five thousands this season, according to [booth total records](#) maintained by the GSEMA.

At MBTA stations, "You have an opportunity to sell to customers that you would never have [had] if you just stayed close to home," said Courtney Scott, who, in addition to Phoebe, has another daughter in Girl Scouts and leads three different troops. "In two and a half hours, you might sell the same amount as you would in four hours at a grocery store."

Scott's troops are based in Dorchester, which, she said, helps give them an edge compared with groups from the suburbs. She added that Scouts from Boston often feel

more comfortable selling in busy urban environments downtown.

“We live in the city, so our kids do this all the time. We’re at a little bit of an advantage,” Scott said.

But she also said door-to-door sales, common in the suburbs, may not be something city troops are comfortable doing.

“And so I think this is a good way the Girl Scouts help the troops in the city equal the playing field,” Scott said.

Troop leaders in the suburbs such as Ramirez recognize selling in the city will require extra legwork — transporting dozens of cookie crates and heavy folding tables, driving in and out of Boston during rush hour — but are nonetheless willing to put in the extra effort to sell at the MBTA.

A portion of cookie sale earnings goes toward funding individual troops’ activities and group travel. Donna Yang, leader of Quincy Troop 68282, has funded trips to New York City and Savannah, Ga., for her whole troop, which she attributed to high cookie sale revenue. Yang has sold at MBTA booths since her troop became eligible as [Juniors](#). This year alone, her troop has sold at seven MBTA stations.

“We have these amazing experiences because of our cookie sales,” Yang said.

In an e-mail statement, deputy press secretary for the MBTA Lisa Battiston said the process allowing the GSEMA to sell at MBTA stations involves issuing a “sampling” permit each year for the sale of cookies at specific stations that stipulates when, where, and how many Girl Scouts can set up a booth.

“The MBTA is proud to support the Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts in their annual fundraising efforts,” Battiston said in the statement.

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