

## Cookies & Fasteners: My Experience on Food Network's "Christmas Cookie Challenge"

By Suzy Cravens

Many people know me as a co-owner or employee of Advance Components, but very few know of my creative pastime of cookie decorating and baking. I started decorating cakes and cookies about 30 years ago. I've sold cakes and cookies, entered cookie decorating contests (and won many times). You can't forget that every I compete in the Great State Fair Of Texas Cooking Contests...I dream of blue ribbons.

Fast forward to 2018, I get a call from Food Network's Christmas Cookie Challenge, and they want to interview me for an upcoming episode of their show. After going through months of SKYPE interviews, baking, and decorating for the producers, I was chosen as a cast member for Season 3 Episode 8.

They flew us to LA to film in March. It was a crazy 72 hours. When on set you couldn't have any electronics, so we were out of contact with work and home for approx. 14 hours every day. It was kind of nice! The hotel we stayed in, Holiday Inn Express, was adequate but not like the hotels I'm accustomed to staying at during Fastener events, with room service and full bar. Most nights, I went to bed exhausted with a pack of peanut butter crackers and a glass of wine (from the bottles I smuggled in my suitcase)!

Filming is exactly as you see it on TV. Everything is timed, frantic, stressful and they interrupt you constantly making you talk to each other or to yourself, explaining what technique you are using. There are camera men, microphones, and producers everywhere, in your way and in your space. I was lucky or talented enough to make it to the last round, making me one of the top 3 decorators. Top 3 was my goal, you see I was competing against professionals. Many things didn't go my way during that round. I cut my finger and had a medic watching me with a magnifying glass. I burned a piece of my gingerbread house since (surprise!) the timer on my station didn't work. And of course, you can't forget about the Tahini, it was an afterthought, and I executed the mystery ingredient poorly. I will never use Tahini again in anything!

When they interviewed me, I told them about the fastener industry, our people & events. Most importantly I told them that our industry, though we are spread across the US and we are in different part of the industry, there is a comradery and we consider ourselves part of the fastener family. Of course, they cut out all references to fasteners! The experience was unbelievably fun and fast paced, just like the fastener industry and just the way I like it!!

