

SOUTH METRO

# QVC serves up prime-time spot for Shakopee soup ladies Sunday

Makers are on during the big football game, but they know QVC has rabid fans, too.

By [John Ewoldt](#) Star Tribune

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GLEN STUBBE - STAR TRIBUNE Mary Dodds and Maggie Mortensen, co-founders of North Aire Market, worked on making soup in their Shakopee test kitchen.

Between 7 and 8 p.m. Sunday, Mary Dodds and Maggie Mortensen are hitting prime time. More specifically, their soup is.

It will be the sixth time since last March that the soup ladies and co-owners of North Aire Market in Shakopee have had their dried soups featured on QVC, but it is the first time they have made it to prime-time television viewing hours. Previous segments ran during the day.

A Pantry Pack of Maggie's and Mary's soups — chicken and dumpling, chicken divan broccoli, mushroom barley and Cheddar potato — will be on sale for about seven minutes during the "What's Cooking with Mary Beth & Rick" segment from 7 to 10 p.m.

Although North Aire's soups will be competing with the second half of the AFC championship game between New England and Pittsburgh, Mortensen is staying positive.

"Praise God I'm not competing with the cheeseheads," she said, referring to the Green Bay Packers matchup with Atlanta earlier Sunday afternoon.

This also will be the first time that North Aire will be shipping the orders from the Twin Cities instead of having them sent by QVC from a Pennsylvania warehouse. "All of the orders have to ship within 48 hours, but we're going for it," Mortensen said. "We've added seasonal employees."



GLEN STUBBE - STAR TRIBUNE

A package of four dried soup mixes made in Shakopee at North Aire Market will be featured Sunday on QVC.

Tim O'Neill, half of the O'Neill Brothers piano duo from New Prague, has sold millions of copies of CDs with dozens of appearances on QVC. He considers it a phenomenal way to give a product national distribution. "It's an amazing way to tell your story and sell your product," he said. "Maggie and Mary have a sweet story that deserves to be told."

The owners have good reason to be optimistic about the latest appearance. Their soups have sold out in most of the previous appearances. During a November airing, Dodds and Mortensen were getting texts and e-mails from QVC reps that their soup was the top seller among 15 to 18 products featured during the two-hour food segment.

Then, singer Frankie Avalon came on with his Tiramisu. "He came on at the last minute and overtook us," Mortensen said. "I told QVC to tell Frankie that if we had to come in second to anyone, we're glad it was him."

Although QVC provided a healthy boost to business last year, the soup ladies have been making and distributing soup for about 30 years. They sell to retailers as varied as Fleet Farm, Sam's Club, Cabela's, L.L. Bean and Lunds & Byerlys, as well as gift shops such as the General Store and Bachman's.

Canned soup has seen moderate sales declines in the past several years, according to Mintel global research company, but dried soups are doing better. North Aire has been ahead of the trend demanding healthier offerings and convenient packaging. Their soups include gluten-free and lower-fat varieties.

Mortensen said that she and Dodds laugh and cheer at the TV while their product is being featured, but Mortensen expects some tears this time.

The recipe for the chicken and dumpling soup is her grandmother's. "She was widowed in her 20s with three kids, and they were dirt poor," Mortensen said. "They lived on soup and scraps for years. Mom said if Grandma had a pot of water and a potato, she could make it taste wonderful."

The four soups featured in Sunday's package are made with more expensive ingredients than most of the other 20-plus soups. One of those ingredients, dumplings, sent the pair on a search beyond the U.S. They eventually found a manufacturer in Germany that makes them to North Aire's specifications, but it involves extra work, time and expense.

"They also deliver more flavor and authenticity, and Grandma Hager wouldn't have had it any other way," Mortensen said.

The soup ladies are cognizant that soup may be an easy sale in January but much tougher from May through September. They are hoping to interest QVC in some of their less seasonal offerings. One showing the most promise is a snickerdoodle popcorn called Pop It Top It.

"They've asked us to send samples after the season is over," Mortensen said.

One North Dakota QVC viewer promised Mortensen that she would try to be a featured caller during Sunday's segment. "She loves QVC and she loves our soup," Mortensen said. "She's got QVC on speed dial."

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