

# Porter's office helped company land contract

By **JERRY WALLIS**  
STAFF WRITER

Part of the job of any state or federal lawmaker is helping constituents untangle themselves from the seemingly endless red tape generated by government bureaucracies.

In the case of Mary Anne Jackson, president and founder of the Deerfield-based My Own Meals, it was the U.S. military's special brand of red tape that led her company to turn for help to U.S. Rep. John Porter and his supervisor of constituent services, Margaret Schlickman.

The result, after years of effort, was that the company signed a contract in June with the U.S. Department of Defense.

It all started during Operation Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf, Jackson said, when military chaplains realized the need for special field rations to meet the religious dietary restrictions of some soldiers.

After Desert Storm, her company began producing such meals commercially, Jackson said, and some military chaplains bought them directly from My Own Meals.

## Kosher meals

My Own Meals eventually developed kosher rations for Jewish military personnel and halal rations for the military's Muslims, Schlickman said, but the brass was less than excited.

"It's something that the Defense Department had never addressed," she explained. "They had no special meals."

Instead of MREs (Meals Ready to Eat), the standard field rations, the military often had to supply fresh food to personnel on restricted diets, Jackson said. Only a small percentage of military personnel required the special rations, she said, which helped keep the brass from considering them a priority.

But the gears of the military machine were turning. In 1991, Jackson said, My Own Meals received an unfunded five-year contract from the Defense Department to develop the special MREs.

According to Schlickman, the company spent a good deal of its own money developing the rations and trying to get them certified by the military.

Porter's office became involved in 1993, Jackson said, and the congressman himself became an advocate of the idea of the special MREs, regardless of their manufacturer.

"Congressman Porter was committed to making sure that these rations got in place," she said.

In 1995, Jackson said, the

military turned over the meals developed by Jackson's firm to two other companies, which were forced to copy them. The military was protecting certain companies, she said, in order to make sure it could get rations from them when they were needed.

"It came down to the Defense Department really not wanting to purchase a commercial product," Schlickman said of the military's reluctance to deal with My Own Meals.

Finally, though, My Own Meals was allowed to bid on

producing the special rations for the military, which led to the company being awarded the contract.

## Demand-driven

In addition to being the first kosher, first halal and first commercial rations in the history of the military, Jackson said, "It's the first ration that's demand-driven."

That means the rations will be ordered by the military as needed instead of being stockpiled, she said.

"We ship it anywhere in the world."

**‘It was very satisfying to see this little company finally recognized.’**

It was important to her and My Own Meals to have Porter and his staff, especially Schlickman, in their corner, Jackson said.

"They never gave up," she

said.

Schlickman said she was glad to be of service. She said her experience with My Own Meals was one of last successes before her recent retirement.

"It was very satisfying to see this little company finally recognized," she said.

The company itself gets full credit for its successful bid, Porter said.

"It was through the efforts of our office that they were treated fairly and were able to bid on it," he said.