



NEWS RELEASE

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Newly certified ‘green belts’ help DeCA become more efficient

*By Kevin L. Robinson,
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FORT LEE, Va. – Becoming better able to deliver the benefit is a standing order for Defense Commissary Agency personnel. Four agency employees are doing just that as newly certified Lean Six Sigma green belt facilitators charged with helping DeCA become more effective and efficient.

“You never reach perfection but you strive for it every day,” said DeCA Director and Chief Executive Officer Philip E. Sakowitz Jr. “These four employees – DeCA’s first green belts – have already done their part through our Lean Six Sigma effort to help this agency improve. Ultimately, this is good news for our customers who see the results of our process improvements.”

DeCA’s four green belt recipients are Sallie Cauthers, chief of marketing for corporate communications; Henry Chambers, IT Enterprise architect, information technology directorate; James Griffin Jr., systems accountant, resources management; and Lisa Jones, accountant, resources management. They received their official green belt certification Jan. 26 in a Pentagon ceremony along with 32 other green belt and two black belt facilitators from other organizations in DoD. They were certified after completing the following projects:

- Jones reduced the time for recording and payment of distributor vendor credit memorandums for overages and shortages by more than 50 percent.

- Chambers eliminated duplication and wasted effort in the process that reviews system change requests and new initiatives.
- Cauthers streamlined the press release approval time from nine days to three and a half days.
- Griffin reduced the number of military interdepartmental purchase requests, known as MIPRs, and associated contracts that were older than 120 days past their completion date. The result was a reduction in the number of un-liquidated obligations older than 120 days for the fiscal year. As a result, the accuracy of auditable records improved.

Lean Six Sigma is a corporate improvement methodology that is designed to fine tune business processes. Lean reduces waste and increases speed by identifying and eliminating nonvalue-added activities. Six Sigma lowers costs and boosts customer satisfaction by eliminating defects or variances.

DeCA started using Lean Six Sigma in 2004 to improve the delivery of products and services to stores and customers, said Sheila Walton, program manager for DeCA's Continuous Process Improvement program. By 2006, the agency's use of the program also fell in line with DoD's CPI program.

"Lean Six Sigma is becoming part of the agency's culture," Walton said. "We are refining how we do business, and at the same time the program reinforces DoD's goal to keep pushing for improvement."

Since 2004, the agency has trained 19 employees as black belts and 21 as green belts, with four of the green belts being certified by DoD. The difference between black and green belts rests in the amount of training and the complexity of the tasks they are assigned. Black belts receive at least four weeks of Lean Six Sigma training versus a week for green belts. Black belts work projects that involve several functional areas, while green belts tackle improvements within their own realm of expertise. DeCA has completed 17 black belt projects and four green belt projects. Ten additional black belt and 16 green belt projects are ongoing.

"The achievements of our newly certified green belts required support from all levels of DeCA which is an essential factor for a successful program," Walton said. "While remaining good stewards of the commissary benefit, we must continue to evolve and strive to create a culture of continuous process improvement."

Photo caption: *DeCA employees pose for a photograph with Elizabeth A. McGrath, principal deputy secretary of defense for business transformation, after receiving their Lean Six Sigma green belt certifications at a Pentagon ceremony on Jan. 26. From left: Henry Chambers, Lisa Jones, McGrath, Sallie Cauthers and James Griffin Jr. (Department of Defense photo)*

About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,400 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America’s military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*