



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

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Commissary's Guard, Reserve on-site sales bring the benefit to shoppers far away from military bases

*By Carrie Williams,
DeCA's Guard and Reserve on-site sales*

NOTE: To see photographs related to DeCA's Guard and Reserve on-site sales, visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/commissary/sets/72157625193472345>.

FORT LEE, Va. – For authorized customers who live many miles from an installation commissary, it can be challenging to realize the 30 percent or more savings available through regular shopping in a commissary.

To make these savings more accessible for geographically remote Guard and Reserve service members and their families, the Defense Commissary Agency began taking a taste of the commissary on the road.

“The Guard and Reserve have, and continue to be deployed in significant numbers alongside their active-duty counterparts,” said DeCA’s Acting Director and CEO Thomas E. Milks, “so the Department of Defense gave DeCA a mandate to expand the benefit to the Reserve forces. We knew these sales were an ingenious way to do it; we knew we had an eager customer base that lived too far from commissaries to shop; and we knew if we could come up with an official program to promote the sales and operate them efficiently, it would help us meet the mandate and create much goodwill.”

For years, commissaries had conducted ad hoc truckload and case lot events that included several Guard and Reserve training sites. However, DeCA first tested the waters for conducting a specific on-site sales program in fiscal 2007 with events at 24 locations.

The program took off with a bang in fiscal 2008 as DeCA received funding for an official Guard and Reserve on-site sale program that brought hundreds of different products – a representative sample of the thousands of items available in most on-base commissaries – to customers in remote locations. DeCA kicked off its “Bringing the Benefit to You” program with a flurry of on-site sales in warehouses, aircraft hangars, armories, tents in parking lots and even the back ends of semitrailers on Guard and Reserve bases across the United States.

Since 2008, the agency has generated more than \$10 million in savings while serving about 193,000 customers through 425 on-site sale events.

With a modest annual budget of \$4.3 million through 2015, the program has proven to be enormously popular with customers, improving their quality of life by giving them the opportunity to stock their pantries and feed their families at substantial savings. In fiscal 2010 alone, customer savings are estimated to be \$4 million.

Here is how the numbers break down:

- Fiscal 2008: 104 events; \$4.4 million in sales; and 41,000 customers
- Fiscal 2009: 165 events; \$9.1 million in sales; and 82,000 customers
- Fiscal 2010: 156 events; \$8.7 million in sales; and 70,000 customers

The on-site sale program became such an integral part of DeCA’s operations that the agency began a recognition program in fiscal 2010 to honor commissaries for their logistical support of the Guard and Reserve on-site events. At DeCA’s 2010 Conference and Training Event in Atlanta, June 8, the agency highlighted stores for their accomplishments in several areas that included the number of sales conducted, total sales amount generated, number of customers served and customer satisfaction.

The awards covered three categories: Small, Large and Superstore. There was a three-way tie for the Small commissary category: Columbus Air Force Base, Miss.; Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont.; and Naval Air Station Meridian, Miss. The commissary at Fort Gillem, Ga., took the award in the Large category for its multiple blockbuster sales at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Ga., and Chattanooga, Tenn. Naval Base Pearl Harbor earned the award in the Superstore category for big numbers at sites such as Wailuku, Kauai and Hilo, Hawaii, and Pago Pago in remote American Samoa.

The growing attention over the events comes as no surprise when you consider that they’ve become such a hit with the thousands of customers served by on-site sales, according to Chris Burns, DeCA’s director of sales. “The Guard and Reserve program produces big results in

terms of quality of life for remote service members and enormous goodwill within the military community,” he said. “The numbers represent positive sales growth for DeCA, and that’s good for the health and longevity of the commissary benefit.”

In fiscal 2011, Burns said DeCA will look for ways to drive down the logistical costs of supporting these sales, allowing commissaries to reach even more customers but spend less to do so. The most notable cost-reducing step is expected to be implementation of Internet-ordering capabilities, allowing customers to order and pay for products online and pick up their orders at a designated on-site location. This is expected to significantly decrease operating costs such as labor, travel and transportation. Additional cost-saving measures include increased planning with Guard and Reserve units to negotiate the use of unit assets, for example: troop labor, materiel-handling equipment and facilities, and early and more aggressive marketing to boost customer awareness of the events.

In addition to supporting Guard and Reserve members, these sales are open to all authorized commissary customers. To see the schedule of on-site sales, visit DeCA’s website at http://www.commissaries.com/guard_reserve_sales.cfm.

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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 more than \$4,400 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.*