



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

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New commissary opens at Keesler AFB to replace the store destroyed by Hurricane Katrina

*By Rick Brink,
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NOTE: To see photographs and video clips from the Keesler grand opening, visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/commissary/>.

FORT LEE, Va. – The Defense Commissary Agency opened its newest commissary April 6 with a grand opening ceremony for a new shopping center that includes an exchange and pharmacy at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss.

A crowd of approximately 1,000 patrons welcomed the new store, built with Hurricane Katrina relief funds. The hurricane, which struck in August 2005, wiped out the commissary and Army and Air Force Exchange Service store. Both have since been operating out of temporary facilities.

Philip E. Sakowitz Jr., DeCA director and CEO, joined AAFES Commander, Army Maj. Gen. Keith Thurgood; Rep. Gene Taylor, 4th Congressional District, Miss.; Air Force Lt. Gen. Richard Newton, deputy chief of staff for manpower and personnel, Headquarters, Air Force; and Air Force Brig. Gen. Ian Dickinson, commander, 81st Training Wing, Keesler Air Force Base, to give remarks for the occasion.

“Today is about thanks,” Sakowitz told the crowd. “Thanks to everyone who worked to make this wonderful facility possible. Wait till you get inside. It will warm your heart. Now you get to enjoy shopping in the Defense Commissary Agency’s newest store with the convenience of having the exchange and pharmacy under the same roof.”

The new commissary, with 24 checkouts, eight of which are self-checkouts, has more than 50,000 square feet of sales area – triple the sales area of the temporary commissary. It is also slightly larger than the one destroyed by the hurricane flood waters. The entire shopping mall is sited well above the Katrina flood level.

Built with energy-saving and environmentally friendly features, the new store is an expansive, well-lit facility, which will add to shopping enjoyment. It features a deli, bakery, sushi to go and rotisserie chicken, fresh produce, fresh meats, chill, frozen and grocery sections that include an assortment of more than 24,000 items.

“This is a great day for all of us at Keesler,” said Gordy Harris, store director of the commissary. “Our customers have been very appreciative of what we’ve been able to offer over the past years, and now they get to enjoy their shopping more because of what we can offer in this great facility.”

-DeCA-

Photo captions:

1st photo – Flanked by Army and Air Force Exchange Service officials on the left and Defense Commissary Agency officials on the right, Senior Airman Brandon Ailes cuts the ribbon for the Keesler shopping mall grand opening April 6 at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss. The mall features the commissary, exchange and base pharmacy conveniently located under one roof. Pictured from left: Brig. Gen. Ian Dickinson, commander, 81st Training Wing; AAFES Senior Enlisted Advisor, Chief Master Sgt. Jeffrey Helm; Maj Gen Keith L. Thurgood, commander, AAFES; Lt Gen Richard Y. Newton, deputy chief of staff for manpower and personnel, Headquarters, Air Force and chairman of the DeCA Board of Directors; Rep. Gene Taylor, Mississippi 4th Congressional District; Ailes; Phillip E. Sakowitz, DeCA director and CEO; Command Sgt. Maj. Victor M. Garcia, DeCA headquarters senior enlisted advisor; and Rogers Campbell, director of DeCA East. (DeCA photo by Nancy O’Nell)

2nd photo – Three-year-old Carlos Hurtado Jr. looks up after spinning the wheel for a health and fitness prize in the Keesler Air Force Base Commissary produce department as Ed Klein looks on. Prizes ranged from coupons for fresh fruits and vegetables to hula hoops, flying disks and jump ropes. (DeCA photo by Rick Brink)

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 \$3,300 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.*