



# NEWS RELEASE

## Defense Commissary Agency

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## DeCA recognizes employees who promote diversity

*By Cherie Huntington,  
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**NOTE:** To see photographs of the award recipients from the Defense Commissary Agency's annual equal employment opportunity ceremony Aug. 12, visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/commissary/4941939819/>.

**FORT LEE, Va.** – A young student storeworker listens carefully as the produce manager with 30 years of experience talks about cross-merchandising watermelons with picnic must-haves from the grocery department.

An Asian-American meatcutter helps a black storeworker locate a family pack of lean ground beef for a customer waiting at checkout.

A woman in customer service shares her ideas for the annual scholarship ceremony with the male store administrator.

A Baptist checking a delivery tells her Jewish colleague she'll be available to work next Saturday when a special program is scheduled at the co-worker's synagogue.

Two grocery storeworkers agree that one can go to lunch first, since he is diabetic and needs to check his blood sugar at a specified time.

The human chain of equal employment opportunity may begin with selfless actions of one person, as described above, but have positive effects that can inspire an entire store – or a worldwide agency. The Defense Commissary Agency recognized such inspiring accomplishments in EEO during its annual awards ceremony Aug. 12 at its Fort Lee, Va., headquarters.

This year's award recipients are cited for their exemplary efforts to promote a culture of diversity awareness and acceptance of people of all ages, races, genders, religious preferences and disabilities. Individual honorees include a store director, a produce department manager and a sales store checker, with a salute to the contributions of a previous honoree who recently passed.

"We're all proud to be part of such a diverse organization with a tradition of acceptance and understanding for individuals of all cultures and backgrounds," said DeCA Acting Director and CEO Thomas E. Milks. "The recipients of this year's EEO awards represent our shining stars who help their teams work together to provide the highest levels of customer service for our customers and their families."

- **Leader of the Year** – *Michael Mena*, store director, Fort Bliss Commissary, Texas.

Mena is the epitome of leadership in cultural diversity and the employer of choice for the El Paso and Fort Bliss communities. His proactive, equality-based leadership provided exceptional mentorship and coaching to women and minorities, crafting a balanced career ladder for all. Census data comparison shows hiring and training by Mena resulted in a workforce where levels of Asian-Americans, African-Americans, Hispanics and women exceed equity levels by wide margins compared to El Paso employment opportunities and demographics. Mena's leadership nurtured an environment where ethnic minorities and female employees represent more than 95 percent of supervisory and work leader positions.

- **Employee of the Year** – *Leon Thomas*, produce department manager, U.S. Air Force Academy Commissary, Colo. Thomas spearheaded ethnic diversity celebrations for commissary employees and organized local events. He also strongly supported church functions and mentored disadvantaged individuals. By promoting ethnic diversity and helping others recognize the historical significance and importance of various cultures, Thomas positively impacted the commissary, installation and community.

- **Disabled Employee of the Year** – *Rita "Diane" Pope*, sales store checker, McConnell Air Force Base Commissary, Kan. Pope was diagnosed with polio in her left arm and right leg at the age of 3. Overcoming many setbacks, her leg became functional with the support of exercise and medication; however, movement in her arm remains extremely limited. Her upbeat personality, "can-do" attitude and unwavering dedication to the commissary team inspire employees, baggers, contractors and customers. Her inner

strength and determination have propelled her to attend college, learn to play the guitar and develop her quilting skills. She has volunteered at the St. Joseph Hospital and Wichita Police Department in Wichita, Kan., mentoring abused children who were taken from their homes because of abuse and neglect. Additionally, she has volunteered at the Perpetual Help Center in Wichita teaching children how to read and mentoring children of all ages. Pope will represent DeCA for Department of Defense disabled employee honors in December.

- **Organization of the Year** – *Vance Air Force Base Commissary, Okla.* The Vance Commissary staff personifies cultural diversity; the perfect “Employer of Choice” model for DeCA. Vance’s proactive, equality-based team leadership provided extraordinary mentorship and professional growth to all people of color, females and persons with mild to severe disabilities. Vance’s leadership championed awareness and total team involvement in Department of Defense and DeCA EEO objectives, achieving the goal of creating professional opportunities for all employees regardless of race, gender or national origin. The store supports the principal tenets of the EEO program, which has resulted in zero EEO complaints in the past eight years. The award was accepted by Vance Store Director Sheila Gilbert.

- **In memoriam** – *Deborah Mundt*, produce manager, Fort Rucker Commissary, Ala. Mundt passed on July 10 after a battle with diabetes that started in childhood. In 1998, she continued working full time after kidney failure forced her to undergo dialysis three times a week. Then in 2002 she returned to work just 23 days after receiving a new kidney, whereas many patients need several months to resume their work schedules. She had more than 29 years of federal service and had been honored with the Secretary of Defense Outstanding Department of Defense Employees with Disabilities Award in 2002. Fort Rucker Store Director Dennis O’Meara accepted Mundt’s award on her family’s behalf.

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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.*