



NEWS RELEASE

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Seafood, celebrity chefs highlight Feb. 8 New Orleans base commissary grand opening

By DeCA Office of Corporate Communication

FORT LEE, Va. – Given that New Orleans is world renowned for the taste and quality of locally caught seafood, customers attending the Feb. 8 commissary grand opening at the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base may not be surprised by the savory aromas wafting from cooking demonstrations.

Seafood tasting is but one of many special events for commissary shoppers getting their first look at the Defense Commissary Agency's newest store. A 9 a.m. ribbon-cutting ceremony sets off a day of special activities. Vendors and manufacturers also are supporting the grand opening with loads of great door prizes and food samplings.

"This new store has been eagerly anticipated by our patrons, who have shopped at an interim commissary for the past 21 months," said Charlita Covington, store director. "I'm sure they'll find the wait worth it when they get to enjoy the services and values this new store offers, plus the one-stop shopping convenience of having the exchange in the same center."

The new commissary, built with surcharge funds, replaces a facility that was demolished nearly two years ago to accommodate new construction at nearby Naval Support Activity New Orleans, Algiers. Since March 31, 2009, the commissary has been operating out of an interim store on the Algiers base.

Features of the new store include more than 24,000 square feet of sales area; nine checkouts and four self-checkouts; full-service meat and produce departments; and a deli/bakery, which are comparable to services provided in the former commissary, but not available in the

interim store. Unlike its predecessor, the new commissary features some of the latest environmental and energy efficiency innovations.

During the event, customers will be able to sample the region's tastiest seafood treats in an atmosphere similar to a Hollywood premiere, said Chris Laborde, a spokesman for the Gulf Coast Alliance, an organization that promotes regional economic recovery, including the sale and consumption of seafood from the Gulf of Mexico.

"No one will blame them if they feel like they're on the set of a cable television cooking channel," he said. "After all, they will be tasting recipes personally prepared, on the spot, by several celebrity chefs from the Gulf Coast region and by the U.S. military's own version of celebrity chefs."

The mini-seafood festival at the New Orleans base commissary kicks off a federal government initiative to sell more fresh, local seafood and more domestic frozen seafood. As the military's grocer, DeCA was able to identify opportunities to increase its domestic seafood offerings in its stores.

The seafood initiative takes on a special meaning in New Orleans, a city that's become the focal point of a broad alliance of regional government and commercial interests working to make sure the Gulf Coast seafood industry rebounds from the one-two punch of Hurricane Katrina and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

"As chefs take turns at the cooking stations, they want commissary shoppers to know Gulf Seafood is not only delicious, it's safe," Laborde said. "Gulf fish, shrimp and other seafood delights have always been wholesome, and after the oil spill, the Gulf catch has become the most highly inspected seafood in the world."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration is the primary federal agency responsible for the safety of Gulf-caught seafood. The FDA is working closely with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other federal and state officials to closely monitor the oil spill situation and its potential impact on the safety of the Gulf state's seafood. They do this by closing any fishing area where tainted seafood could potentially be caught and by inspecting seafood for any contamination levels that could pose a health risk. This inspection includes sampling seafood from inside and outside closure areas, at dockside and at market.

During the grand opening event, civilian and military "destination chefs" will let go of some of their recipe secrets so patrons can make the most of commissary seafood. Patrons also will have the opportunity to have their pictures taken with chefs. In addition to the civilian chefs, the U.S. military's Joint Culinary Center of Excellence, Fort Lee, Va., will bring in highly

trained military chefs who operate the most prestigious of the military dining rooms. There will be one chef each from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard. The center also will provide equipment and logistical support to all the chefs.

On the Gulf Coast and beyond, DeCA is increasing its selections of domestic seafood in fresh and frozen programs, according to Chris Burns, DeCA's director of sales.

“On the fresh front, military shoppers will see more seafood road shows at commissaries across the United States,” he said. “The events last for two to three days, usually over a weekend, and may take place either in the store or outside. These temporary sales supplement the usual commissary seafood selections and provide patrons further opportunities to purchase popular items. Emphasis is on contracting with companies that provide fresh, local and regional seafood at commissary-level savings.

“In the frozen foods aisles, DeCA is arranging freezer cases and hanging signs so shoppers can plainly see which seafood items are domestically sourced,” he added. “This helps shoppers who prefer domestic seafood.”

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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.*