



# NEWS RELEASE

## Defense Commissary Agency

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## 'I found incredible savings'

### Senior enlisted advisor promotes commissary benefit

*By Cherie Huntington,  
DeCA public affairs specialist*

**NOTE:** To see photographs of Command Sgt. Maj. John M. Gaines Jr., DeCA's senior enlisted advisor, visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/commissary/sets/72157626169360649>.

**FORT LEE, Va.** – Though Army Private 1st Class John M. Gaines Jr. worked at the Fort Campbell Commissary, Ky., on his first enlistment nearly 30 years ago, he preferred fast food to the wholesome “groceries” he stocked.

He had no inkling of how important his unused commissary benefit would become. And, he never dreamed that someday he would serve as the senior enlisted advisor for today's Defense Commissary Agency.

Now a command sergeant major for this worldwide agency with nearly 250 stores, Gaines tells about a recent conversation he had with a Fort Campbell soldier.

“A young staff sergeant with a new baby on the way and two other children told me his family really depends on the commissary to help meet their budget,” Gaines said. “He told me he took his shopping list and compared commissary prices to grocery stores off base, and the commissary won every time – even with the surcharge.”

As for Gaines, he said once he married and started a family, he left his fast food days behind as money got tighter.

“I found incredible savings at the commissary,” he said. “Before, I hadn’t understood what the commissary benefit offered. Now I see that it’s our job as leaders to educate our junior people so they use their benefit.

“And, once they use the commissary, the benefit becomes one of the reasons why our young service members decide to remain in uniform – I know it was for me when I reenlisted.”

New service members may be away from home for the first time, he said, and they might not realize the important role the commissary plays in morale and managing personal finances. “Money saved from commissary shopping delivers more discretionary income. That’s money you get to keep to spend or to save as you please. It’s more than \$1,500 a year for a single member, nearly \$3,000 for a couple. For a couple with a child, the savings approach \$3,500 annually, and more than \$4,400 for a family of four,” Gaines said.

Nowadays, commissary shopping figures into financial management guidance provided by military services, as well as in benefit information provided in basic military training and technical schools. For Gaines, it’s an easy sell.

“Commissaries today are so much more than just grocery stores,” he said. “There’s more personal service. You go shopping for a barbecue, and you can find out what cut of meat works best for your plans – maybe get something cut especially for you, and learn how to prepare it or what you might serve with it. There are classes on healthy cooking for dorm dwellers, nutritional tours and even healthy eating activities for children.”

Gaines said he’s proud and humbled to serve in his new position, which entails advising the DeCA director on enlisted service members’ needs related to the commissary benefit, and serving as agency liaison with the senior enlisted leadership of the armed services.

He encourages customers to share their compliments and suggestions via the agency’s “Your Action Line” program. Each store keeps action line cards available for shoppers, or they can submit them online at <http://www.commissaries.com>.

“People generally tend to believe their input gets lost and there’s no action taken, but that’s not the case here,” he said. “It’s important to push your comments forward, because someone else might have the same thoughts and questions. DeCA strives for excellence to deliver the best service possible, around the world, and to do that requires listening to our customers.”

Gaines’ travels already have shown him that the drive for excellence extends to “where the rubber meets the road” at the store level. “The dedicated folks in DeCA want to do great things for service members, providing outstanding customer service at all echelons,” he said. “I

see employees culling produce, stocking shelves and cleaning, and I realize that's their way of contributing to the military services of our nation. We're a team, and we want to know what we can do to make *your commissary worth the trip.*"

**-DeCA-**

**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.*