



NEWS RELEASE

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Release Number: 62-11
Date: June 29, 2011
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Customers welcome new commissary at Fort Bliss

*By Nancy P. O’Nell,
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NOTE: *To access photos of the Fort Bliss Commissary grand opening, go to <http://www.flickr.com/photos/commissary/sets/72157626954861117>.*

FORT BLISS, Texas – Thousands of shoppers were welcomed into the new commissary at Fort Bliss, Texas, June 29, just minutes after a big red, white and blue ribbon was cut by Defense Commissary Agency and Fort Bliss officials. Shoppers who had waited in line for hours were rewarded with promotional prices throughout the store and food samples served at nearly every turn.

Army Pfc. Monica Arriaga, attending the grand opening with her husband, Abran, and their 8-month-old daughter, Angel, said the store is loaded with extras for shoppers “It’s nice, and there’s a lot of stuff here to choose from,” she said. “We used to live across the street from the old store, but we’ll have no problems going to this store.”

DeCA’s newest store, with its high ceilings and skylights, features a large produce department, an international deli-bakery, sushi, sandwiches-to-go and fresh seafood. Carnivores will appreciate the large meat department with meatcutters on duty to provide cooking information and fill custom orders.

Near the deli is an olive bar, a feature becoming more common in DeCA’s larger commissaries. There are also recipes on circular racks in the meat and produce departments that could make even the most timid of cooks try out new foods.

“We’ve been waiting for this day for a long time,” said store director Mike Mena, who has worked in military commissaries for 28 years, including three at Fort Bliss. “This store is big and it’s beautiful. With the Fort Bliss community growing, it’s great to have this world-class facility to serve them in.”

The \$25 million facility replaces the 30-year-old store just a few blocks away. Planning for a new and more modern facility began shortly after the Base Realignment and Closure Commission announced more troops would move to Fort Bliss. The number of active-duty service members at Fort Bliss has increased from 10,000 to 25,000 since 2005; and the number of eligible commissary shoppers in the area, including Guard and Reserve members, retirees and their families, today exceeds 150,000.

Speaking during the ribbon-cutting ceremony, DeCA Director and CEO Joseph H. Jeu expressed appreciation to the soldiers gathered and explained DeCA’s passion for serving its customers.

“DeCA’s standards for customer service are high, because our customers are you – the men and women in uniform who serve and protect our nation and our families,” he said.

Jeu was followed by U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Dana J.H. Pittard, 1st Armored Division and Fort Bliss commanding general.

“This new commissary is a key component for the outstanding quality of life our soldiers and their families experience at Fort Bliss,” Pittard said. “El Paso area retirees will also benefit from the new store.”

Activity in the parking lot was nearly as exciting as inside the store. Following music played before and after the ribbon-cutting ceremony by the Army’s 1st Armored Division Band, local bands, DJs and dancers performed on stage. Kids of all ages tried their skills on a climbing wall and slithered down a super slide. Free massages were offered, and many enjoyed the luxury.

A popular resting area and respite from the 100-degree Texas temperatures was a 40-foot, air-conditioned “hydration tent” with video games, and free food and beverages.

Back inside the store, National Football League Hall of Fame celebrity and Dallas Cowboys legend Bob Lilly and New Orleans Saints runningback Reggie Bush signed autographs for a line of loyal fans, until well past noon.

Commissary vendors donated all entertainment, food and prizes to the military community, a fitting kickoff to a celebration that will run through the Fourth of July weekend, with outside events ending on July 2.

For John Szilvasy, 74, a retiree who had served 28 years in the Army, the new store is

“fantastic. It’s another way of the taxpayers saying thank you for what these soldiers do in serving this nation. It will be fun shopping here.”

One of many efficiency features in the store is electronic shelf labels. The labels are controlled by a computer that sends a signal to small receptors that hang from the ceiling throughout the sales area, and the receptors transfer that signal — the price — to the shelf label for each product.

“These are real timesavers,” Mena said, “Just setting up the store the electronic labels saved us time. They’ll save the commissary staff hours of work each month.” U.S. commissaries post price changes on the 1st and 16th of every month.

Commissaries operate to provide a benefit for military service members and retirees. DeCA receives appropriated funds to cover operating costs such as labor, utilities and some supplies and make no profit on the sale of merchandise, setting prices only high enough to cover the cost of goods. Shoppers pay a 5 percent surcharge on their entire bill at the checkout, which is used to build new commissaries and modernize existing ones.

The new commissary, located on the south end of the Freedom Crossing Shopping Center, is open 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m.

-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 amounting to thousands of dollars annually. For current savings figures for various groups – single member up to a family of seven – visit <http://www.commissaries.com>. 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.*