



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

Office of Corporate Communications
1300 E Avenue, Fort Lee, VA 23801-1800

Tel: (804) 734-8000, Ext. 4-8524 DSN: 687-8000, Ext. 4-8524

FAX: (804) 734-8009 (two pause symbols) 7-8773

or DSN: 687-8009 (two pause symbols) 7-8773

www.commissaries.com

Release Number: 53-09
Date: June 8, 2009
Contact: Millie Slamin, public affairs specialist
Tel.: (804) 734-8000, Ext. 4-8111
E-mail: mildred.slamin@deca.mil

Zone 21 manager wins prestigious DeCA leadership award

*By Millie Slamin,
DeCA public affairs specialist*

FORT LEE, Va. – Richard “Dick” Cook, Zone 21 manager for DeCA East, is the recipient of the Defense Commissary Agency’s Blackwell Leadership Award for 2008. The award is presented each year to recognize the employee who has demonstrated exceptional leadership, courage and integrity in the performance of his or her duties. Cook received the award May 19 at DeCA’s Annual Training Event and Conference in Richmond, Va.

“Great leaders have vision and direction,” said DeCA Director and CEO Philip E. Sakowitz Jr., “and Dick has certainly proven his focus is on working with his team and our industry partners to help deliver a premier benefit.”

DeCA East Acting Director Robert Vitikacs agreed, noting that Cook has repeatedly demonstrated his propensity for performance-driven leadership that has continued to exceed expectations by introducing innovative programs that increase sales and savings.

Under his leadership, Cook’s team increased sales by 3.8 percent and customer count by nearly 2 percent, besting the agency’s average increase of 1.6 percent.

One of his most significant accomplishments was the customer database he developed for National Guard and Reserve commands last year, which doubled the existing on-site sales per zone. The program is now in place nationwide as DeCA’s Guard and Reserve On-Site Sales Program, credited with saving associated costs by 30 percent or more.

Vitikacs said Cook keeps his team focused on exceeding customer service expectations –

even during the often incredibly complex and operationally challenging transitions unique to military installations.

“Where others see risk and uncertainty, he sees opportunity – embracing and fostering an environment where his team’s creative and innovative solutions routinely overcome challenge after challenge,” Vitikacs added.

As for his leadership abilities, Vitikacs said Cook is the quintessential leader who communicates a common vision to his team and encourages them to achieve it, always leading by example and inspiring others to follow his lead and be innovative and creative when looking for new ways to deliver the commissary benefit to customers.

“He personifies the very spirit of public service, because he intuitively understands and nurtures in others the understanding that the truest of leaders simply serve,” Vitikacs continued. “His many years of operational, fiscal and managerial excellence and experience lend him an unprecedented and iconic level of authenticity and credibility with store directors, zone managers and region leadership.”

Cook said he is deeply honored to have been chosen from a field of very highly qualified candidates, all of whom were deserving of the award.

“To me, this award means working hard, maintaining one’s integrity, persevering through challenging times, and staying focused on the goal of serving our servicemen and women and their families,” Cook added.

The award recipient said he considers team building to be his strongest leadership trait.

“I recognize that meaningful success and change cannot come from me alone,” continued Cook. “All I have achieved during my career has been the result of working as a team.

“My peers, subordinate employees and DeCA’s leadership throughout my career have been outstanding. I would have never received this award without their support, mentorship and guidance.”

The Blackwell Leadership Award is named in honor of the late Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Michael W. Blackwell, who served as DeCA’s senior enlisted advisor to the director from March 1994 to March 1995.

--DeCA--

Photo Caption:

DeCA Command Sgt. Maj. Victor M. Garcia (left) and DeCA Director and CEO Philip E. Sakowitz Jr. pause for a photograph with the winner of the Blackwell Leadership Award for 2008, Zone 21 Manager Richard "Dick" Cook. The award is presented each year to recognize the employee who has demonstrated exceptional leadership, courage and integrity in the performance of his or her duties. (Photograph by DeCA East Public Affairs Officer 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 \$3,400 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.*