



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) 734-8248 DSN: 687-8248

www.commissaries.com

Release Number: 78-09
Date: August 14, 2009
Contact: Pete Skirbunt, DeCA corporate communications
Tel.: (804) 734-8000, Ext. 4-8510
E-mail: peter.skirbunt@deca.mil

DeCA renews efforts to hire employees with targeted disabilities

*By Pete Skirbunt,
DeCA corporate communications*

FORT LEE, Va. – The Defense Commissary Agency recently announced its goal to hire at least 189 people with targeted disabilities in the next two to three years.

Targeted disabilities include severe hearing or vision impairments, missing extremities, and partial or complete paralysis. They also include serious medical conditions such as convulsions, mental retardation, mental or emotional illness, and severe distortion of the limbs or spine.

This hiring effort is part of an overall goal, mandated by the Department of Defense, to have 2 percent of the entire DoD workforce consist of people with targeted disabilities. DeCA presently employs 126 such individuals, so an additional 189 would bring the agency's total to 315; that is 2 percent of the agency's 15,714 civilian employees who are not contract workers or local nationals working at overseas stores.

“It only makes sense that everyone has job opportunities,” said DeCA Director and CEO Philip E. Sakowitz Jr. “That includes an accessible workplace, equal opportunities in being hired, and equal opportunities for training and promotion. We’re going to do everything we can to make sure this initiative succeeds.”

Claudie Grant of DeCA's equal employment opportunity office stressed that the agency is not filling an arbitrary quota with individuals who may or may not be qualified for employment, and that every individual DeCA hires will meet all requirements for their positions.

“We will not relax our standards either in hiring or ability to perform just to hire a person with a targeted disability,” he said. “Anyone with a targeted disability needs to be just as qualified as the other top candidates for a given job.”

The renewed effort by the Department to hire qualified people with targeted disabilities was prompted by a decreasing number of such individuals in the DoD workforce. “That means,” Grant emphasized, “that we have to not only do a better job of hiring such individuals, we also have to do a better job of keeping them.”

While DeCA will carry out these efforts at all levels – the headquarters, the region offices and at the commissaries – one store has already been remarkably proactive in hiring individuals with targeted disabilities. At Marine Corps Base Cherry Point, N.C., store director Phyllis Black recently hired eight such people. That is more than 20 percent of the individuals with disabilities hired in recent months by the agency’s 255 stores. “It just took off,” Black said. “I got excited about it, because there’s nothing that people with targeted disabilities can’t do, and I’m glad to give them a chance to prove it. The people I’ve hired all have positive attitudes that make up for any limitations their disabilities cause them. I wish I had more of them!”

Grant said he believes if one store can do it, so can others. “Cherry Point has given everyone an example to emulate. We’re asking that hiring officials at all our locations give individuals with disabilities a fair chance to compete for jobs.”

Alan Jones, the zone manager for Cherry Point and other commissaries in North and South Carolina, was equally enthusiastic. “We’re thrilled to support this program, because it brings us employees with a positive attitude and a great work ethic,” he commented.

Bob Vitikacs, DeCA East acting director, noted that stores in his region have recently hired 11 people with targeted disabilities in addition to the eight at Cherry Point. “We’re encouraging all of our stores to be proactive in this program,” he said. “Cherry Point’s success is really an inspiration to everyone. We can help improve people’s lives and simultaneously improve the agency.”

The future looks encouraging for the agency’s Individual with Targeted Disabilities program, Sakowitz said. “We will work toward not only meeting, but exceeding the 2-percent goal. This is a good thing for the Department, the agency and the employees.”

- 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 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.