



# NEWS RELEASE

## Defense Commissary Agency

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## Seafood festival highlights New Orleans Commissary grand opening

*By Rick Brink,  
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**NOTE:** To see photographs and video related to the grand opening of the New Orleans Commissary, visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/commissary/sets/72157625895005069/>.

**FORT LEE, Va.** – Gulf Coast seafood took center stage Feb. 8 as a large crowd gathered to welcome the Defense Commissary Agency’s newest commissary at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans. The grand opening featured a mini-seafood festival that highlighted the agency’s focus on adding Gulf seafood as a choice for commissary shoppers.

“This mini-seafood festival kicks off a government initiative and the Defense Commissary Agency’s commitment to sell more fresh local seafood and domestic frozen seafood,” said DeCA Director and CEO Joseph H. Jeu to an audience at the grand opening ceremony. “Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus asked us what could be done to support the economic recovery of this part of our country, and this is just one example of what’s being done.”

Jeu joined Rear Adm. Townsend “Tim” Alexander, commander of Navy Region Southeast, and Michael Good, chief operating officer of the Navy Exchange Service Command, in giving opening remarks for the 9 a.m. ceremony. The event marked the opening of the Belle Chasse base’s new shopping center, featuring a Navy Exchange and a food court along with the commissary. Belle Chasse is located about 20 minutes south of downtown New Orleans.

The New Orleans store's grand opening day sales of \$82,088 and its 1,316 customer transactions were the most one-day results the commissary has recorded in nearly a decade.

Live cooking demonstrations of Gulf seafood highlighted the event, and customers formed long lines at cooking stations outside the commissary's entrance to sample specialties prepared by chefs from the Gulf area and from the U.S. military's Joint Culinary Center of Excellence, Fort Lee, Va. Nearer the store entrance, a Seafood Road Show featured locally caught shrimp and other seafood for customers to buy.

"This is a major play on the part of DeCA, and it's so appreciated by the folks in this area who are recovering from the one-two punch of Hurricane Katrina and the Gulf oil spill," 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. "We're getting the message out to the rest of the country that Gulf seafood is healthy, nutritious and good to eat."

From shrimp gumbo to oysters Rockefeller, the aromas of freshly cooked seafood greeted shoppers as they approached the store. Customers had a variety of choices as other commissary vendors and manufacturers offered up free sausages and other food samples both outside and inside the store. Just inside the entrance, dessert awaited in the form of slices from a huge, lavishly decorated cake and other baked specialties provided by the store's deli-bakery operators.

"I've walked all the aisles and it feels so spacious," said Susie Stewart, wife of a Marine, as she maneuvered her shopping cart through the crowd. "Even with opening day crowds, it's just great to shop here. It's so nice."

Shoppers enjoyed the new store that has 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 – all in a modern, energy-efficient building.

"Customers came up to tell me how excited they are about their new store, and it's so convenient to have the exchange next door," said Charlita Covington, commissary store director. "This means so much to the military community here, and we're glad to be able to serve them in such an outstanding facility."

The commissary's mini-seafood festival is part of DeCA's support of a federal government initiative to sell more Gulf seafood. As the military's grocer, DeCA has identified several opportunities to increase its domestic seafood offerings in its stores.

For fresh seafood, these opportunities include more seafood road shows at commissaries across the United States. Seafood road shows usually last two to three days 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.

For shoppers who prefer frozen seafood, DeCA is arranging freezer cases and hanging signs so they can determine which seafood items are domestically sourced.

**-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.*