



# NEWS RELEASE

## Defense Commissary Agency

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## Commissary produce managers get ‘top’ recognition

*By Nancy O’Nell,  
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**NOTE:** To see photographs of Jennifer Smith and Donald Courtright, visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/commissary/sets/72157626428327699>.

**FORT LEE, Va.** – Similar to Oscars and Emmys for actors, the produce industry also recognizes its best talent once a year; and in 2011, not one, but two Defense Commissary Agency produce managers will be honored.

Jennifer Smith, from Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Calif., and Donald Courtright, from Beale Air Force Base, Calif., were chosen from hundreds of nominations by United Fresh Produce for its list of the Top 25 Retail Produce Managers in the United States and Canada. Smith and Courtright will be honored during the association’s convention and expo in New Orleans in May.

“The competition for the Top 25 list is steep,” said DeCA Director and CEO Joseph H. Jeu. “I am extremely proud of both Jennifer and Donald for achieving this recognition and for the value they bring to our commissary customers every day.”

The evaluation criteria considered excellence in merchandising, special displays and promotions, community service and commitment to total customer satisfaction. Nominations represented managers from 21 different supermarket chains, independent retailers and DeCA.

Smith and Courtright both agree that the high quality standards and best value that commissaries offer its customers are their best assets for running a winning produce department, but both managers do even more to capture the attention and approval of their customers.

“Here at Camp Pendleton, we have really excelled in innovation,” said Smith. “We try new displays, new merchandising techniques and new ways to get our messages across to our customers.”

A regular display in the Camp Pendleton produce department is “Jennifer’s Pick of the Week,” which started as a way for her to feature in-season fruits and vegetables or a produce item she was able to get an exceptionally good price on.

“Our shoppers look for ‘Jennifer’s Pick of the Week’ as soon as they walk into the produce department,” said Smith. “If they don’t see it, they’ll ask, ‘What does Jennifer have on sale this week?’ ”

Courtright takes time to visit local farms near Beale Air Force Base, in northern California, during the growing season, and he has built relationships with the farmers. Some of the farmers come to the store to offer samples and talk about their produce. This is possible, he said, thanks to the relationship he has with the Beale Commissary produce supplier General Produce.

“I can take a peach off a tree at a local farm and sample it one day,” said Courtright. “If it’s right, I tell our produce supplier rep, and she’ll get those peaches for us the very next day.

“We’re fortunate to have General Produce as a business partner,” Courtright added. “They help us put on contests, tours and educational events for children and adults to make shopping at the Beale Commissary fun.”

A message both Smith and Courtright express strongly is working with and taking care of their produce team. Smith meets regularly with her employees to go over her department’s standards of quality and pass out information she gets from the Camp Pendleton Commissary produce supplier, Coast Produce.

“We established 12 quality standards, and we talk about those each week, and how to attain them,” said Smith. “Then we go over the growers’ information. I believe it’s important to tell our shoppers why the pineapples are extra sweet this month, or how cold weather in Florida has affected the orange crop. I turn the growers’ information into questions and make a game out of it. I quiz the staff, and we all learn together; then we share the information with our customers.”

Courtright says he has been influenced by observing the strong character of his father-in-law, a religious man, who has helped many strangers throughout his life. Courtright employs those same traits in the commissary and believes in treating his employees the way he would like to be treated.

“What I do have control over is how we work together as a staff, which I see as one of my most important roles,” said Courtright. “Learning the trade is easy; it’s the character of the person that makes a good manager.”

The effect that having fun in the workplace can have on a department has not escaped either Smith or Courtright. The Beale Commissary offers special sales on “Wacky Wednesdays” and “Thunderous Thursdays,” and in June, the Camp Pendleton produce team will be running in the Camp Pendleton “Mud Run,” dressed as bananas.

This is the fourth consecutive year a military commissary produce manager’s name has appeared on the Top 25 Retail Produce Managers’ list. Previous DeCA winners were Harry “Spike” Lewis, Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., 2008; Nan Day, Naval Air Station Lemoore, Calif., 2009; and Juronald Williams, Ord Community Commissary, Calif., 2010.

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**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.*