



# Commissaries are Always *'Worth the Trip'*

By CSM Victor M. Garcia, DeCA Senior Enlisted Advisor

**OUR** service members and their families, like all Americans, are living through some tough economic times right now. I don't have to tell you how much the prices of everything from clothes to food have increased.

It's at times like these that you truly appreciate the savings the military receives through its commissary benefit – savings that amount to 30 percent or more when compared to commercial prices. I've been shopping in commissaries since I was a young private. Even then I realized how much money I could save purchasing a six-pack of soda there as opposed to anywhere else. And, when I became a family guy, buying groceries in the commissary saved us even more money. I am a believer that commissaries are worth the trip.

Just do the math: A family of four saves almost \$3,000 annually; couples can save nearly \$1,900; and single military members more than \$1,000. Think about what you could do with that extra money: save for your children's education, put money aside for costly home or car repairs or whatever budgetary needs you are facing.

I've worn the uniform for more than 30 years, and I can testify to how important the commissary benefit is as part of the military's nonpay compensation package for our troops and families. It continues to be a major factor in keeping our highly qualified, trained men and women in uniform. Many of our young service members simply could not make ends meet without the savings commissaries provide.

If you have access to the Internet, DeCA's website, <http://www.commissaries.com>, helps you expand your benefit and stay connected to what's happening in your commissary – wherever in the world you are stationed. The site helps customers make healthy financial choices by listing what's on sale – to include prices of promotional items – in the "Savings Aisle" under the "shopping" tab. Customers can print a list of

items on sale at their commissary and find Internet coupons on the "Links" page. Customers can also sign up for commissary news via e-mail through "Commissary Connection."

The DeCA website is particularly popular with authorized shoppers who want to save money by taking advantage of the worldwide case lot sales held every May and September. During these events savings run as high as 50 percent, compared to commercial prices. The site's case lot sale page helps customers locate the sales that are occurring near their location. The site also lists DeCA's on-site sales supporting Guard and Reserve members.

If you are trying to stay fit, go on the website and click on "Ask the Dietitian," a nutrition forum hosted by Army Reserve Lt. Col. Karen Hawkins, a registered dietitian. Customers can exchange questions, comments and experiences on nutrition topics. If you need help planning your next meal, check out "Kay's Kitchen" online. There, DeCA's home economist Kay Blakley offers plenty of quick, easy and nutritional recipes using both classic and diverse ingredients from apples to zucchini.

And you can always go on [commissaries.com](http://commissaries.com) to purchase or donate commissary gift certificates through "Gift of Groceries" and select from more than 100 gift baskets through "Virtual Commissary" – both great options during the holidays.

We in the military specialize in taking care of each other. In that spirit, I ask you to help us spread the word about the commissary benefit so all service members – active-duty and Guard and Reserve alike – and their families can take advantage of it.

And, on behalf of the 18,000 employees of the Defense Commissary Agency, I'd like to wish our service members and their families a happy and safe holiday season and a peaceful and prosperous year in 2009. Whether you are state-side, overseas or deployed downrange, our hearts and prayers are with you. **R&NG**