

Defense Commissary Agency Takes Benefits to Guard, Reserve

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The Defense Commissary Agency is taking the commissary benefit to National Guard and Reserve members and their families living in remote areas.

"The 2004 National Defense Authorization Act authorized full commissary benefits for members of the Ready Reserve," said Richard Page, acting director at DeCA. "Through our new "Bringing the Benefit to You" campaign, we are reaching out to our Guard and Reserve members who have earned the commissary benefit, but who cannot easily travel to a local commissary to shop on a regular basis."

"Bringing the Benefit to You" involves conducting on-site sales out of warehouses, aircraft hangars, armories, tents in parking lots, and even the back ends of semi-trailers at remote locations where soldiers and families do not have access to a commissary.

This is part of the Army's reinforced commitment of support to military members and their families through the Army Family Covenant. A core military family support element and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to

family readiness and enhance the quality of life for America's military and their Families.

"While the focus is on Guard and Reserve, the on-site sales are a boon to all authorized shoppers living near them," Page said. "The Guard and Reserve members have earned this benefit and we want to make sure that we are delivering the benefit to them."

More than 55 percent of the National Guard and Reserves members do not live in what is considered the immediate area of a commissary.

"This is just part of a larger picture," Page continued. "Back in the fall when I became the acting director of DeCA, I had several priorities, one of which was to make sure that we were doing our very best for the Guard and Reserve members not located near a commissary."

Page said DeCA is exploring ways to increase the frequency of the on-site sales and locations by looking at the demographic areas that are largely populated with the Guard and Reserve members.

"It depends on the size and the demographics of the area,"



Guard and Reserve members and their families shop at the on-site case-lot sale at the North Carolina Air National Guard base of the 145th Airlift Wing, April 3 through 6 in Charlotte, N.C.

Page said. "Fort Jackson is the closest commissary in the Charlotte area. There is a large population of military members in this area that do not have access to a commissary, so I will estimate doing this quarterly and try to tie it in with the drill training weekends so that it will be beneficial for the soldiers and we can get maximum exposure."

Military members from all branches of the service including retirees flocked to the 145th Air National Guard Wing hanger, in Charlotte, N.C., in April for a case-lot sale, the first of its kind in this area.

Information on other benefits for military members was also available at the sale. Representatives were on hand promoting the Army Integrated Family Support Network through the Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command, military OneSource, and Armed Forces Recreation opportunities. Other information about Web sites to access other resources and benefits was available to military members and Families as they filed through the doors to make their purchases.

DeCA's own dietitian Dietician Maj. Karen Fauber was also on hand with information about the agency's newest health and wellness initiatives. "We partner with Tricare on this initiative," Fauber said.

"I love this case- lot sale," said Clinton R. Douglas, a former Marine. "My wife and I were here three days ago and we are back here again today. We can get everything here that we could get at Sam's, only here we can get it at a cheaper rate and no sales tax. Everybody treats you nice and that's one thing I love about it."

Tech Sgt. Marvin Williams was equally excited about the case-lot sale. "I have lived in Rock Hill, South Carolina since 1990. The closest commissary is about an hour and a half from me. Most people in this area have to travel an hour and a half to two hours to get to Fort Jackson to shop. It is a good opportunity for me and I look forward to hopefully having more opportunities like this one."

"I am really excited about this," said Phillip E. Sakowitz Jr., executive director of the U.S. Army Installation Management Command and the new director for DeCA. "It is all associated with helping soldiers and families."

"This is my first case-lot sale." said Leslye A. Arsht, deputy under secretary for the Military Community and Family

Policy. "I have really wanted to have these expanded so that we are better supporting Guard and Reserve military members in areas where they have to go a long way to take advantage of the commissary benefits."

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 five percent

surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones.

"It is everything I had hoped it to be and it has great crowds even though the weather isn't great," Arsht said. "People are coming; some are coming even more than once. They are seeing lots of great bargains and we are really feeling like this was an important step in supporting a quality of life for the guard and reserve and the rest of the folks who are eligible and who live in the area." **R&NG**