



Making Commissary Benefits Better

By CSM Victor Garcia



IT'S been a year since I signed on as the senior enlisted advisor for the Defense Commissary Agency, and this has been one of the most fulfilling assignments of my career. Why? Through this job I am able to talk to commissary customers around the world.

As the agency's senior enlisted advisor it's my job to reach out to you, the men and women in uniform and their families, to help enhance the awareness of the commissary benefit. But that's only part of what I do. I also listen to any issues and concerns you may have about your benefit and relay that feedback to DeCA's leadership. By listening to you, we are able to make the necessary adjustments and improvements to deliver the best commissary benefit possible.

There are about 12 million authorized beneficiaries of the commissary benefit, and we want as many of you as possible to know about it, use it and tell us about the experience. That's why you are likely to see me somewhere in your community, be it in the states, somewhere in the Far East, Europe – even participating in events such as the Army Ten-miler with our director and CEO, Philip E. Sakowitz Jr., or attending the Marine Corps Marathon – to help spread the news about this wonderful benefit and hear from you how we can make it better.

As the agency's senior enlisted advisor and an authorized shopper I have a unique view of the benefit among DeCA leadership. That's a point of view that allows me to walk into a commissary and represent you with the objective of offering our best – be it available products at the best price, superior customer service and clean, functional facilities – to the best shoppers in the world.

There are no tricks or fine print to this benefit. The Department of Defense has mandated that we deliver at least a 30 percent savings to authorized patrons. And, we do that with

room to spare, meaning that anyone who consistently shops in commissaries year round will save the equivalent of more than \$30 for each \$100 they spend on groceries compared to commercial grocery stores.

With new service members joining the military every day we cannot rest on this message and assume that all those who are authorized know that the commissary is their benefit. Too often our new troops miss out on the commissary because they think it's just for married military members or for those who live on post. The fact is that you earn the benefit by being in uniform or fulfilling the requirements of retiring after honorable service.

I would not be doing my job as a senior noncommissioned officer if I didn't do my best to take care of the troops and their families. That's why everywhere I have gone in the past year, I have made it a point to see for myself the quality of the local commissary. If I see something that needs to be improved, I talk to the people who can make it happen. As I walk up and down the commissary aisles, visit the warehouses and talk with many of the agency's 18,000 dedicated employees, I can honestly say that DeCA is delivering a world class benefit to you.

So I ask you to check out the benefit for yourself. Visit the DeCA Web site, <http://www.commissaries.com> and see what specials are available at your local store. You can find out the schedule for the next worldwide case lot sales in September, the date and location of the nearest Guard-Reserve on-site sale, and access the "Shopping" section where you can view prices and percent savings of specific sale items in the store where you shop. You can also find out valuable information on recipes, nutritious food and other tips for living a healthier lifestyle.

If you don't have a computer, visit any of our commissaries and talk to the store staff. It won't be long before you realize that the commissary is worth the trip. 