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Guard and Reserve Unit On-Site Sales Grow

By Command Sgt. Maj. Victor M. Garcia

FOR the past two years, the Defense Commissary Agency has taken the benefit on the road to Guard and Reserve members and their families through special on-site sales held in warehouses, aircraft hangars, armories, tents in parking lots and even the trailers of big rig trucks.

The idea is simple: By bringing "the store" by the truckload to Reserve and Guard units that are geographically dispersed from our 255 commissaries, DeCA is able to deliver a measure of the benefit to our authorized customers who have earned it.

During this challenging economy, every bit helps. Access to groceries at savings of 30 percent or more when compared to commercial stores is a deal our Guard and Reserve members have not passed up. We have completed 128 events through the end of July – with another 67 planned by Sept. 30 compared to 104 conducted for all of fiscal 2008. Since Oct. 1, 2008, we have served 67,509 authorized customers at these on-site sales compared to 41,357 served in fiscal 2008.

We've come a long way from the 21 sales that we held in fiscal 2007, and we're making them better. We recently automated the check-out process by using hand-held wireless terminals, which expedite customer check out.

We continue to refine the product selection available for on-site events to meet our customers' expectations and reduce left-over stock. And, we aren't stopping. With each event we are evaluating and improving to make the next event even better than the last.

These events began as a way to stretch military paychecks even further as commissary buyers negotiate special pricing on bulk products to deliver deep discounts on your favorite products. And, you can get more savings by bringing coupons that can be redeemed during checkout. It's no wonder on-site sales are so popular.

To find the location of an on-site sale near you, go to DeCA's Web site at www.commissaries.com for a list of future events. While you're on the site, take advantage of all the other features that allow you to find and contact the nearest commissary, access

information on recipes and shopping tips through Kay's Kitchen, the DeCA home economist; and find health and wellness information from the DeCA dietitian. You can also sign up for commissary news via e-mail through "Commissary Connection."

If you'd like DeCA to consider hosting an on-site sale in your area, please consider the following criteria:

Your location must have 150 or more Guard and Reserve personnel (includes full-time support, selected reserve and Individual Ready Reserve) in the immediate location of the Guard/Reserve installation where the event will be held.

Your unit must be at least 50 miles or 45 minutes of one-way travel time from the nearest commissary facility, and should have an adequate facility to host the event.

The facility for the sale must have sufficient utilities, rest-rooms and equipment to serve the public, and there should be customer parking and handicap accessibility within a safe walking distance.

To begin the process for requesting an on-site sale, a representative of the Guard or Reserve unit must speak with the store director of the nearest commissary. The host commissary subsequently works with the requesting Guard and Reserve unit to select items to offer during the sale. You can find contact information for commissaries by clicking on the "locations" tab on <http://www.commissaries.com>.

Those of us at DeCA are fond of repeating our director's slogan about "the commissary – it's worth the trip." However, with Guard-Reserve on-site sales, I feel it's worth the journey to bring the benefit to you. **AF**

Army Reserve Command Sgt. Maj. Victor M. Garcia is the Defense Commissary Agency's senior enlisted advisor to the director. Garcia advises the DeCA director on the needs of enlisted service members related to the commissary benefit and serves as the agency liaison with the senior enlisted chiefs of the armed services. He is also the military advocate for DeCA customers – active-duty, retired and forces in reserve – and reaches out to all current and potential customers to raise awareness of the benefit and the savings it provides.