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'FUEL WITH US': COMMISSARIES BEGIN LAUNCH OF DIETITIAN-APPROVED, READY-TO-EAT STATIONS FOR ON-THE-GO TROOPS

By Kevin L. Robinson, DeCA public affairs specialist

Soldiers grab a quick meal from a fueling station at the Fort Myer, Virginia, Commissary. (DeCA photo: Simone Blythe)

FORT LEE, Va. - The lifestyle of a young service member can be beyond hectic with ongoing deployments and constant training rotations.

To help these busy service members access quick, nutritious meals and snacks, the Defense Commissary Agency launched the first phase of its dietitian-approved fueling station program (www.commissaries.com/fueling_stations) at 22 commissaries in February. More stores will be added later this month in phase two of the roll out.

The stations offer service members nutritious fueling foods they can use to build a meal or enjoy a before- or after-work out snack - items they can take on missions or stock in their barracks, said Bill Moore, DeCA director and CEO.

"Our fueling stations help show young service members that their commissary is a great destination for dietitian-approved, quick meals and snacks that are tasty and won't require them to spend their time frequenting fast food establishments," Moore said. "We hope to further our footprint of being their meal-time location to help maximize their performance and their health."

The following commissaries have fueling stations: in Virginia - Fort Belvoir, Marine Corps Base Quantico, Fort Myer, Langley Air Force Base, Naval Station Norfolk, Fort Lee and Naval Air Station Oceana; in Maryland - Naval Air Station Patuxent River and Andrews Air Force Base; in Florida - Naval Air Station Jacksonville and MacDill Air Force Base; in Oklahoma - Fort Sill and Tinker Air Force Base; Fort Bragg South, North Carolina; Fort Benning, Georgia; Schofield Barracks, Hawaii; McChord Air Force Base, Washington; Fort Carson, Colorado; Fort Sam Houston, Texas; Fort Rucker, Alabama; Fort Riley, Kansas and Columbus Air Force Base, Mississippi.

The fueling stations vary in size, space and makeup by store based on available space. All items for the stations are approved by Deborah Harris, registered dietitian and DeCA health and wellness program manager, MPH, RD, CDE.*

"The fueling station has been well received by our patrons," said John Blythe, store director at Fort Belvoir, one of the pilot locations for fueling stations. "It offers a vast selection of healthier food, snack and refreshments that allows our patrons to make healthier nutritional choices. Our dedicated merchandising unit allows for a convenient central point of sale with products that have been dietitian-approved! We have noticed a significant sales lift on these products and we are proud to support the installation in their health and wellness needs."

Before launching the program, the commissary agency piloted it in 14 stores to promote the concept to those installations that their commissary can support weekly grocery shoppers as well as young soldiers who need a quick meal and snack destination, said Bonita Moffett, DeCA sales director.

"Commissaries are a key player in the 'fueling for performance' messaging being delivered throughout the force that connects the importance of nutrition and diet to overall readiness," Moffett said.

"Our fueling stations target young service members who may not be cooking their own meals nor be in the habit of a weekly shopping pattern," she added. "Our ready-to-eat program can save customers' time and money while raising the nutritional focus of our younger shoppers by giving them a quick meal and snack option besides fast food."

The refueling station launch follows the commissaries' release of the new Dietitian-Approved Thumb program (DAT) which uses DeCA-designed software to analyze and identify products in most of the commissary food categories based on up to 86 of the FDA-defined health attributes. The attributes analyzed identify dietitian-approved foods that limit added sugar, sodium and unhealthy fat while offering whole grains, healthy fats, fiber or lean protein.

Whether it's fueling stations or the DAT nutrition guide, DeCA is engaged in identifying the commissary as one of several DOD focal points for health and wellness in the following ways:

- Targeted messaging such as "Cook More Meals at Home," "Dietitian-Approved," "We did the Work for You," and "Fuel with Us," to connect young troops with the nutritious items in their stores
- Increasing stock lists of dietitian-approved and ready-to-eat, single serving and ethnic frozen entrees
- Working with industry partners to promote "Better for You" products and incorporating past military leaders as brand ambassadors to reinforce to service members that the commissary is their top option as a fueling source
- Raising the ante with installation health advisors, branch dietitians, wellness center staffs, morale-welfare-recreation (MWR) outlets and liaisons with enlisted troops to help educate younger customers about nutrition and healthy eating patterns

"The commissary scores the highest on the installation per the Military Nutrition Environment Assessment Tool and this further reinforces that we are the place to access nutritious foods to include ready-to-eat meals," Moore said. "We should be considered by our military community as a key asset in achieving health and wellness goals, as well as supporting their individual readiness."

"We want our service members, especially those on the go performing their missions, to know their commissary is a safe, quick and easy option to meet their fueling needs," he added. "Although this effort was launched with our busy service members in mind, we hope that busy families use it, too."

-DeCA-

Note: *Deborah Harris has a Masters of Public Health degree, and is a registered dietitian and certified diabetes educator.



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