



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

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Excellence in produce

Oceana Commissary manager among 25 recipients
of United Fresh national recognition

*By Rick Brink,
DeCA public affairs specialist*

Note: To read this release online, go to the DeCA website.

FORT LEE, Va. – Naval Air Station Oceana, Virginia, Commissary produce manager Jaleisha Freeman is a United Fresh produce manager of the year award recipient for 2020, but she’s quick to mention her team as deserving the honor, too.

“I believe our Oceana produce team and I together set the standard of excellence by doing the little things in order to complete the main goal, which is to offer the best quality produce to our patrons,” Freeman said about being one of 25 produce managers nationwide and in Canada to have received the award.

Those little things added up enough for the United Fresh Produce Association to recognize



Oceana Commissary produce manager Jaleisha Freeman is one of 25 recipients of the United Fresh produce manager of the year award. (DeCA photo)

Freeman as a top retail produce manager. For the past 16 years the program has recognized the role produce managers play in influencing consumers to shop for fresh produce, according to Tom Stenzel, UFPA president and CEO.

“More so than ever before, we are extremely fortunate to have these outstanding produce managers representing our industry and working each day to deliver a positive customer experience in the produce department during the coronavirus pandemic. We’re especially grateful for their resolve in the face of this public health crisis,” Stenzel said in an April 22 award announcement.

For Freeman and her team, maintaining a great produce department comes down to basic teamwork and creativity, all with the customer in mind.

“My team and I work very hard to clean daily, rotate and cull properly, promote innovative ideas when it comes to rearranging our department in accordance with the seasons as well as for display contests,” Freeman said, “and overall just having a positive attitude that translates to our patrons and enhances their shopping experience.”

Freeman started her Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) career in San Diego as a student hire while a college freshman and also served as produce manager at Moody Air Force Base Commissary in Georgia before coming to Oceana in 2019.

“She has certainly made a difference in our produce department, from the enthusiastic way she and the staff approach product merchandising, to the helpful way they interact with customers,” said store administrator David Matern. “Jaleisha is a valued team player who knows what to do and how to get others excited and involved.”

Her merchandising strategy? Keep it fresh for the customer.

“The most important thing about fresh produce merchandising is tailoring your displays to your audience, as well as presenting everything fresh and full. We serve patrons who come from all over the world, of varying demographics,” she said. “Tailoring our merchandising to our audience generates more sales and more excitement in the store.”

She cites what the store did in March to merchandise grapes as an especially appealing effort.

“Our MPG merchandiser, Tim Bennett, and I did a ‘Grape Madness’ display in the front of our department to go along with March Madness. We had white and red seedless grapes on display in the form of a basketball court with an audience, as well as two referees. Even though only the red grapes were on sale, both the red and the white were flying off the shelves,” she said.

Freeman credits her career success to her parents and the many people she’s worked with

during her time with DeCA.

“My mother and father are both U.S. Navy veterans and raised me and my sisters in a household that expected excellence,” she said. “I thank them both very much for raising me to value hard work, family and teamwork. My personal thanks goes to everyone in DeCA for this opportunity and recognition. It is an absolute honor to me and my team here at Oceana, as well as my former team at Moody. I wouldn’t have such success if it wasn’t for all members of both teams.”

The 25 award winners will be honored during the “Retail-Foodservice Celebration at United Fresh LIVE!” virtual event the week of June 15.

-DeCA-

About DeCA: *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. Commissaries provide a military benefit, saving authorized patrons thousands of dollars annually on their purchases compared to similar products at commercial retailers. The discounted prices include a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America’s military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*

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