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## Attention, shoppers: New commissary opens at submarine base

[Judy Benson](#)

### Military families waste no time stocking up after ribbon is cut

**Groton** — Just a few minutes after the new Navy Commissary opened to customers Wednesday morning, Julie Qualley pushed a cart along the meat aisle, looking for a juicy- looking steak for dinner.

"I love the produce, and the whole store is much easier to move around in, much easier to find stuff," said Qualley, whose cart so far held a couple of packages of ground turkey, several zucchini, a container of strawberries and four packages of fresh mushrooms. "It has a much easier flow."

Qualley, a Groton resident whose husband is retired from the Navy, was one of dozens who lined up on the brisk, breezy morning awaiting the opening of the new store at the conclusion of a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Joe Cancellieri of Norwich, who retired from the Naval Submarine Base, said he shopped once a week at the older, smaller commissary, and was eager to see the new one.

"I've been looking forward to it for months," he said, as he stood in the long line before the opening. "The meats are very good, and they have the best prices."

The \$15 million project, funded by the Defense Commissary Agency with funds from a 5 percent surcharge added to grocery bills, is the fourth commissary at the base, the first one opening in 1918, said Capt. Carl Lahti, commanding officer of the sub base.

"The commissary has always enjoyed a robust patronage by all military members, and this new commissary is bigger and better than its predecessor," he said.

The new 57,000-square-foot store replaces a smaller space shared by the commissary and the Navy Exchange, which will now take over that entire space, said Rick Brink, spokesman for the agency. It has an expanded inventory including a larger delicatessen and bakery, and is powered by energy-saving light fixtures and refrigeration units.

"I think there's going to be a run on the rotisserie chicken today," U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., said at the end of his brief remarks during the ceremony.

Joining him at the ceremony were U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District. Courtney said the new store will make an important contribution to ensuring good quality of life for military families and retirees in southeastern Connecticut. Both he and Blumenthal, along with other speakers, said the investment in the new store also helps solidify the sub base's future, adding to the more than \$100 million worth of infrastructure improvements made over the last nine years.

"This commissary makes the statement that this sub base is not going away," Blumenthal said. "It remains absolutely vital to our nation's security."

Being able to shop in the new store, he added, is a benefit military families have earned.

"They and their families deserve a quality of life that matches their quality of service," Blumenthal said.

Brink said prices at the store are about 30 percent below those at commercial supermarkets. In 2013, commissary sales totaled \$21.9 million from a customer base of about 32,500. The store is open to anyone who currently serves in or is retired from any branch of the military and Coast Guard and their families.

At the close of the ceremony, Keith Hagenbuch, executive director for store operations for the agency, invited the awaiting customers inside.

"The doors are open," he said. "Welcome, and shop, shop, shop."

Among those who took his advice was Tina Lee, whose husband serves in the Coast Guard's International Ice Patrol, based in New London. She came both to do her regular weekly shopping and to hear her son and other members of the West Side Middle School band perform at the ceremony.

“I come twice a week for the price and the convenience,” said Lee, a Groton resident, who was checking the prices on jars of mayonnaise. “I like it so far. The aisles are much wider, so it’s easier to maneuver.”

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