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**New Commissary A Testament to Teamwork
Office of Congressman Tim Murphy
August 13, 2012**

In December 2011, Congressman Tim Murphy announced that the Department of Defense (DOD) had formally cleared construction of a new \$15 million commissary in Moon Township. After six years of determined efforts by Rep. Murphy and the Western Pennsylvania congressional delegation to ensure the region's 168,000 military families would continue to have a place to buy affordable groceries, the project could now move forward without any further legislative action.

In satisfaction surveys, commissaries are consistently rated as one of the most highly-valued fringe benefits by service members. At commissaries, authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a five percent surcharge to cover the expenses of operating, modernizing, and building new morale, welfare, and recreation facilities. Military families save an average of more than thirty percent on purchases at commissaries compared to groceries and goods sold at commercial stores. For families of enlisted service members, who earn on average \$36,261 a year, the thousands of dollars saved annually on groceries goes a long way toward making ends meet.

In 2005, the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) announced the closure of the Charles E. Kelly Support Facility in Collier. As is typical when military installations are shuttered, other facilities connected to the installation are also closed. For the region, this would mean the closure of the connected commissary, affecting over 168,000 active duty military families, reservists, and veterans.

Murphy included language in the BRAC report to study and review the necessity of building a replacement commissary. As Murphy sought to ensure the study and needs analysis were completed, the Charles E. Kelly facility was still slated to close by the end of September 2008. By fall 2007, Murphy secured assurances from the Department of the Army to keep the commissary open until a decision on whether to build a replacement was finalized.

In August 2007, the House of Representatives passed the Defense Appropriations bill, which contained \$4 million secured by Congressman Murphy for building a new commissary. This funding served as the seed money necessary to grade and prepare the land for the new building as well as build ancillary parking lots and infrastructure.

To ensure the project was cost-effective, the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) ran financial models on the project cost, projected annual sales, effect on military recruitment, and even considered whether there were alternatives. In April 2008, DeCA had given initial approval for the project but additional funds were still needed for construction. In fall 2008, Murphy secured the help of former Congressman Jack Murtha in transferring an additional \$8.2 million to the DeCA construction account for purposes of building the new facility in Moon Township.

However, the work was not complete. Every successive session of Congress brought new challenges. Murphy and others had to pressure the Pentagon to stay on task and complete their analysis. Meanwhile,

each newly elected group of legislators from Western PA in the House and the Senate had to be educated on this issue, learn of its merits, and ultimately persuaded that this was a project worthy of the Western Pennsylvania delegation's support. Bringing these fellow legislators on board was critically important towards building a broad coalition of supporters to keep the Pentagon on task to complete the internal review while working to secure federal funds through the legislative process.

A site would also need to be chosen for the commissary. In January 2009, Rep. Murphy wrote to DeCA urging construction on the grounds of the former 99th Regional Readiness Command. Four months later, in May, the Pentagon would agree. At this juncture, the Commissary Operating Board and the Undersecretary for Personnel and Readiness within the Department of Defense deemed a new facility in Moon Township to be a financially responsible way to serve the interests and needs of the region's military community. In December 2009, Congress enacted legislation with an additional \$5 million in funds if necessary to cover any cost overruns of the commissary project.

Throughout the process, Murphy and others organized dozens upon dozens of meetings with congressional stakeholders and the Pentagon. Meanwhile, Murphy would convene DOD meetings back home in Pittsburgh with local base commanders and the region's military community. Even after lining up the funding and the internal reviews were complete, every 't' had been crossed, and every 'i' had been dotted, hurdles still remained. In 2011, Murphy secured support to complete the project from the leadership of the House Armed Services Committee. Leadership at the Committee would work with Murphy to remove remaining obstacles in the Senate. In December 2011, those barriers were removed when the Pentagon acknowledged that Congress — through appropriations of funds by Rep. Murphy — had given DoD full authority to proceed with construction.