

Fast Pace, High Volume As Breakfast, Food and Snack Sales Grow

JBMDL Fort Dix Express/Class Six/Gas, JB McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J.

Celebrating her eighth year at the JBMDL Fort Dix Express, JB McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., and her overall 25th year with the Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES), Express Manager Amy Chenail manages the flow of merchandise and sales — and enjoys the traffic it brings — at one of the system's top-30 stores by volume.

"The Express store is a dynamic and exciting place to work," Chenail said. "The pace is typically fast, the volume of merchandise high, and the quantity of customers we get to meet in any given day is awesome."

Chenail, whose previous assignment was at the main store of Robins AFB, Ga., and later at Camp Darby, Livorno, Italy, told *E and C News* that the Express "is a unique business, and was a change of pace for me when I returned to CONUS and left the main store (BX/PX) environment."

She said that while she was in the main store environment overseas she was able to visit many bases throughout Europe. "I feel so lucky to have had so many great work experiences and to have forged life-long friendships with colleagues, customers, and neighbors."

When she came to the Fort Dix Express, she said, "I instantly loved the challenge of so many businesses being run under one roof! Convenience, Class Six, Fuel, Snacks, even an embedded Dunkin' Donuts in our case — it keeps it interesting!"

Chenail receives a lot of personal satisfaction when she can help direct customers to the right products for their needs. "I love sharing my personal experiences with Italian and German wines, beers, and specialty foods with our Class Six and Express customers," she noted. "It's great when we can direct a customer to a brand of wine or specialty beer that invokes

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— Amy Chenail, Manager, JBMDL Fort Dix Express/Class Six/Gas, JB McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J.

for them a happy memory of their past travels around the world."

To keep up with patrons' needs, Chenail said that she has had to continually educate herself on what is new and trending. "With the explosion in popularity of eating and drinking 'local,' I like exploring our local wineries and breweries in the area and share the information with our customers," she said. "It's great when we are then able to offer some of those things in our store."

INSIDE STORY

The Express, which is open Monday through Friday from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m., Saturday from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., and Sunday from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., also offers 24-hour fueling, with 16 gas dispensers and two diesel dispensers.

Chenail said that fiscal 2017 inside store sales year-to-date through October were slightly above the same period the prior year at \$5.63 million versus \$5.59 million, a 0.71-percent increase.

The manager added that overall sales, including fuel, were nearly 11 percent above what they were a year ago, at \$12.57 million versus \$11.34 million.



Chenail

The store has achieved these increases in spite of lower customer counts. "Our daily customer counts are down about 2 percent, while our average transactions are higher by about 2 percent," she reported.

"Overall sales including gas reflect a higher fuel price due to a 12-cent gas tax increase that went into effect in November of last year in New Jersey," she explained, adding that the store is "constantly striving" to increase inside sales, "and is pleased that despite having less foot traffic, we have maintained the previous year's sales, plus some, as we go into the full swing of fourth quarter sales."

Chenail said that food "continues to be a growth category for us" and the store is realizing about 3.5-percent growth in sales in this area.

"Premium snacks, salty snacks, and 'Better for You' selections available in our Operation Be Fit assortments do really well at our location," she noted. "Our customers appreciate being able to

AAFES PHOTOS



Operation Be Fit assortments are very popular at the Express. Food continues to be a growth category for the store.



Candy is a popular add-on item for customers of the JBMDL Fort Dix, N.J., Express.



The Express offers numerous choices in its breakfast assortment, everything from cereal (shown in photo) to fresh-cut fruit.



Spirits is the top-selling category by dollar volume in the Express' inside assortment, generating fiscal 2017 year-to-date sales through October of \$1.57 million, a slightly more than a 6-percent jump from the \$1.48 million posted a year earlier.

Fort Dix Express, JB McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J.

Fiscal 2017 Year-to-Date Best-Sellers by Unit Volume

- 1) Nestlé Pure Life (1 gallon)
- 2) Coca-Cola smartwater (1.5 ltr.)
- 3) Bananas
- 4) Marlboro Gold King Box
- 5) Coca-Cola smartwater (1 liter)
- 6) Newport Box
- 7) Nestlé Pure Life (1 ltr.)
- 8) Original Gourmet Lollipop
- 9) Monster Zero Energy Drink (16 oz.)
- 10) Monster Energy Drink (16 oz.)

*Note: Through October 2017.
Source: AAFES*

come in and buy a two-pack of hard boiled eggs, a Greek yogurt, and a cheese stick, and maybe they'll still get a candy bar to share with a buddy ... but like that, they also have healthy options available to them."

The store's Snack Avenue assortment of ready-to-go items, as well as heated sandwiches, hot dogs, coffee and fountain drinks, continues to outpace prior-year sales.

"Year to date, we are up 6 percent in this category," she said. "Anything from grab and go fresh fruit — which is up 16 percent — to selections on the Roller Grill — up 40 percent — or our Premium Java Coffee selections — up 9.5 percent — are outpacing prior year sales."

Chenail said that on the Class Six side, spirits is the top-selling department inside the store, with sales of \$1.57 million registering slightly more than a 6-percent jump from the \$1.48 million generated a year earlier.

The increase in spirits sales has been partially balanced by dips in both beer and wine sales. Chenail reported that beer sales are "slightly below last year" at \$954,089 versus \$961,297, a less than 1-percent decrease, while wine's \$747,970 in activity is 2.04 percent less than the prior year's \$763,513.

TOP SELLERS

Chenail said that the Express' top-selling items are a mix of what one would generally find in a convenience store, but the store prides itself in selling the most natural beverage around.

"Water, water, water! — We sell lots of water," she noted. The subcategory accounted for four of the top 10 best sellers, including the store's two top-selling items.

'WHAT'S NEW?'

To invigorate alcoholic beverage activity, "We work closely with our vendor partners to bring in new product launches, build exciting displays, and execute product demos in the store," she noted. "In the Class Six, we have items located in each category at the front of the category highlighted as 'what's new!' Especially in wines, the choices can be overwhelming, and it really helps the customer identify new things, by creating a section of new items."

Throughout the store, "We have put a big emphasis and set up dedicated space to highlighting new items to market in all categories and are getting them up front and in the eye of the customer," she explained. "In the Snack Avenue, seasonal and new coffee flavors are highlighted each month, and F'real 'blend-your-own' milk shakes feature limited-time flavors that create excitement in the category."

The addition of more fresh and to-go food and beverage items has given customers new options to try. "Many people are out of the house for the entire day and may eat two or even three meals away from home," Chenail said. "Adding the island coolers that feature house salads, soups, fresh fruit, and lots of higher-protein choices for snacks or meal replacements near our Snack Avenue has really highlighted our commitment to healthy options.

"We have our regular customers that we see a couple of times a day, and many customers who stock up each morning for the day ahead."

CANDY

Candy is another popular item available at the store. Chenail said that candy — which has registered \$87,458 in sales thus far in fiscal 2017 — is promoted in the store "through many channels."

Among these promotions, she explained, "Monthly specials can be highlighted through window-cling posters on the building, pump top-pers and communicator signage at the gas station, at the shelf, in holiday shippers and at the cash register for impulse buys, as well as being advertised in promotional tabloids."

BREAKFAST FAVORITES

Chenail noted that a few of the top breakfast sellers at the Express include fresh bananas, Ruiz French Toast Sausage Breakfast Tornados, two-pack hard-boiled eggs, and "a variety of flavors" of Quest Bars.

HOLIDAY PREPARATIONS

The changes permitted for the holidays to displays and planograms at Express store-level are limited but significant.

"Most of our store layout is fixed, but we do have some flex space for promotional items," Chenail said. "For fourth quarter and the holidays, we get a lot of gift sets and special spirit items, so we may move pallets and build temporary shelving to better highlight those items.

"We have fun and build exciting displays with our vendor partners' assistance for things like Apothic Wines and October's 'Wine of the Month' with a Halloween theme," she explained. "For the Super Bowl, we always add on to our snack and beer displays, and have customer giveaways of sports-related items during the season.

Depending on how items are procured, getting them far in advance can be essential to ensure that the Express has what it needs during these times of higher traffic and demand. Chenail said that for items that are corporately procured, "it may even be six months out, but items that are locally purchased through our direct store delivery (DSD) method can be sourced as the events occur," Chenail said. "Special items that are imported or of a limited nature usually are planned for a few months ahead of the event to make sure we get adequate quantity."

—E and C NEWS