


 AFES

KMCC BX/PX Massive Hit With Servicemembers, Families — And ‘It Feels Like Home...’

By Phil Gray
Managing Editor

RAMSTEIN AB, Germany
On Sept. 21, the Army & Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES) opened its new Kaiserslautern Military Community Center (KMCC) Main Store here. The BX/PX, which is the largest military exchange in the world, unfurls over a spacious 165,000 sq. ft. of selling space when combined with the Shoppette, Book Mark and other AAFES-directed activities.

The consolidated facility has a 443,000-sq.-ft. footprint and totals 844,000 sq. ft., including Air Force Services' 350-room eight-story Ramstein Inn Visitor's

Quarters (VQ). The whole ensemble in its vast entirety almost succeeded in matching the size of the smiles that engulfed the faces of local patrons on grand opening day when they entered the store.

The new \$103.7-million complex was built to serve the greater volume of servicemembers stationed and/or in transit through Ramstein AB, following the closure of Rhein-Main AB, as well as a significant and diverse patron base from the surrounding region, including Wiesbaden, Heidelberg, Vogelweh, Landstuhl, Kaiserslautern, Baumholder, Sembach, Stuttgart and beyond. And, as predicted,

eligible customers from all over have flocked to KMCC to enjoy the region's premier American retail, dining, entertainment and services experience.

FULL SERVICE

Together with Air Force Services offerings, the KMCC BX/PX gathers together a full portfolio of department and specialty store shopping, lodging, concessions, entertainment, banking, beauty/barber, casual dining and personal services, across one attractive and accessible facility.

The location is also home to a 10-restaurant 38,180-sq.-ft. central food court, Exchange New Car Sales, an Outdoor Recreation Center, and Ramstein Tickets and Tours (RTT).

Those are the highlights, but patrons' smiles have been telling the true story of KMCC.

CUSTOMER COMMENTS

"We drove an hour from Wiesbaden to get here; it's beautiful, it's big!" reported one Army family. "We're excited to see what kind of sales they have going on."

"I'm impressed with the whole store, I'm overwhelmed," said Spc. Kimberly Fiedler, USA.

Around every other aisle, it seemed, a patron was

greeting another customer they hadn't seen in a long time. The store had immediately begun to live up to its promise as a community gathering point.

Cheyenne Gonzalez, a former Army servicemember who had served in Korea and wife of Sgt. Miguel Gonzalez, USA, came to the store with her friend Krystal Buchanan, wife of Sgt. Matthew Buchanan, USA. "We thought, 'Well let's go together, it doesn't make sense to take two different vehicles.' So worth the trip — very worth the trip!" they said.

The store opened just in time for the Miller family. "My husband's deploying so we're doing early Christmas shopping," said Nicole Miller wife of Sp. Agt. Timothy Miller, USAF. "That is for daughter, that is for son, that is for husband, that is for me — we're done."

"It feels like home," said another patron. "If it works like that and customers feel like that, then we've done our jobs," said Rhonda Brown, a consultant for one of the vendors that helped set up several of the store's concept shops.

"It's a long time coming; I'm so excited," said Amy Nance, wife of Rickey Nance, an Air Force servicemember based at Ramstein. "It has more of the American shops that we look for; this has much more of a mall feel."

WALLET VOTING

The patrons, as retailers are fond of saying, also voted with their wallets. Opening day sales — on a Monday no less — totaled \$1.239 million, and were quickly followed by an opening weekend of \$1.845 million. But the customers were not done: the second weekend matched the first with another \$1.8 million, spurring the store to sales of \$7.2 million in its first nine days.

According to Main Store Manger Stephanie Burns, the store had \$37.5 million in inventory on hand. About half that was sold by the end of October, when patrons spent a further \$12 million — a more than 22-percent increase over prior-year sales in the old facilities. Morale,

KAISERSLAUTERN MILITARY COMMUNITY CENTER, GERMANY, GRAND OPENING

Photo: Tech Sgt. Kenneth Bellard.



Celebrating the opening of the new AAFES BX/PX at the KMCC Retail and Services Complex, the exchange service's commander, Maj. Gen. Keith L. Thurgood, USA (foreground right) assists one of AAFES's youngest patrons (center) help make KMCC's Grand Opening ribbon-cutting ceremony memorable for the thousands of customers gathered there. From left, assisting with the ribbon cutting are AAFES-Europe Commander Col. Charles Salvo, KMCC Main Store Manager Stephanie Burns, AAFES-Europe Senior Vice President Jack Morris, Maj. Gen. Thurgood, Herr Schuch of LBB Construction, and KMCC General Manager Tom Gross.



Smiling faces were in abundance during the KMCC grand opening.



Welfare and Recreation (MWR) coffers stood to benefit from almost \$58,000 in earnings from sales.

WELCOME ADDITION

Judging by the grins on patrons' faces during the opening day, and customers' shopping fervor during subsequent weeks, the long-awaited retail and services hub is a welcome addition to the region's military community.

"When I think about this facility and others we are building right now, this is part of keeping the promise that we've made to our troops and their families all across the globe, that we would deliver quality goods and services and infrastructure that's commensurate with the quality of service they provide to the nation," AAFES's Commander, Maj. Gen. Keith L. Thurgood told *E&C News* shortly before the opening ceremony.

"When you walk into this facility, this is what I would call a 'Wow!' experience. You leave here thinking, 'Wow! This really is a first-class shopping experience for our patrons and customers here.'"

WIDE SUPPORT

Thurgood added that the project's realization would not have been possible without the support of "all 44,000 of our AAFES associates worldwide, our great trading partners, the German government, the U.S. government, the great Wing support, the civil engineers, and many others. This is really a collaborative effort that's going to make a big difference for this community."

KMCC General Manager (GM) Tom Gross termed it "the greatest AAFES facility ever built in the history of the benefit. ... A lot to be proud of," and "a lot of work — from the whole staff of AAFES across the board, the Air Force, LBB Construction, thousands of people pulling together — was necessary to make this happen."

AAFES had "never done anything this large before," Gross explained, "let alone operate five outlying stores — Vogelweh BX, Vogelweh PowerZone (previously the world's largest PowerZone), Car Care Store, Furniture Store, and Ramstein BX — until the last day. Their staff came into this building today. ... They will work here; this building will have over 800 AAFES employees between food service and retail.

"We take pride in that we gave (provided) great service until the last minute, we didn't close a week prior," Gross pointed out.

"From the moment it was opened — I was on the floor all day long — I did not hear one complaint about 'it's about time,' I did not get any sense of disappointment," Burns added. "I felt that 'Wow' factor that we've talked about." The customers, she said, "were 'Wow, I can't believe that we have all this product and all of this new hot merchandise and all of these interac-

tive shops. I think that they were really bowled over by that.

"When you're overseas, you so enjoy the experience and opportunity to see the world while you do what you do. That's a wonderful benefit of being overseas, but at the same time, you crave a piece of home. This facility gives you that taste, flavor, and touch of home."

FULL SERVICE

Convenience and functionality are keys to the project. "My Service Business Manager Kim Singer constantly reminds me what generates the bottom line in this company," Burns said. In addition to the food court, she explained, patrons "have the Hofbrau Haus, The Body Shop, the Spa, and who can forget the customers' ability to fly into the terminal, check into the services hotel, and then go and get a manicure at the Spa, go and see a movie at the four-plex theater upstairs. It's not just shopping; it's an experience.

"Mom can shop, Dad can go and get a haircut, and the kids can go to see a movie, and then go eat altogether. I think it's an awesome way to bring families together."

TEAM EFFORTS

The undertaking was a team effort of incredible proportions. "Stephanie Burns, the main store manager, really did a phenomenal job, planning this all out," added AAFES-Europe Commander Col. Charles Salvo, USA.

"It's very rewarding for the staff who have worked setting up this store and preparing for this opening for so long. All these customers have come for the ribbon-cutting and the grand opening," Salvo said, referring to the happy throng of patrons gathered for the opening. "The AAFES staff are just so proud; it's such a win-win situation for everybody."

MAIN STORE

The main store itself brings together a state-of-the-art PowerZone, Furniture, Outdoor Living/Sporting Goods, and Toy-



Shopping was a total family experience for Airman James Egan, his wife and children.

AAFES-Europe Commander Col. Charles Salvo, USA, and AAFES-Europe SVP Jack Morris enjoy the moments preceding the grand opening.



The new \$104 million, 444,000-square-foot KMCC, Germany, Retail and Services Complex had its grand opening on Sept. 21. The Air Force Lodge, concessionaires, a Food Court and other service operations opened two months prior.

Air Force Photo: Tech Sgt. Kenneth Bellard.

land/Four Seasons stores, together with AAFES's largest collection of softlines, hardlines and consumables areas under one roof.

From one department to another, patrons enjoyed a host of contemporary concept stores, state-of-the-art shopfittings and custom and prototype signage, wide aisles and an expanded merchandise selection. The BX/PX's multiple "store-within-a-store" concept shops highlight leading brands including Martha Stewart, Victoria's Secret, Vera Bradley, Nike, Under Armour, Jack Wolfskin, Coach, and Pink.

"AAFES has debuted some special initiatives here, including INC and Style&Co." Salvo explained. "These are new partnerships. Some of them are cutting edge — for example, the Apple store is the first in Europe."

The new Apple store located adjacent to the PowerZone (PZ) was a top attraction, with many servicemembers taking the opportunity to explore the product lines and enter grand-opening prize contests. The PZ is among the first AAFES stores to feature interactive kiosks and the exchange service's new "ARC" consumer electronics display areas that provide hands-on consumer electronics experiences for interested patrons.

CONCOURSE MALL

A congenial and attractive sky-lit concourse mall arches around the entire outside perimeter of the main store, providing a pleasant stroll between three main access points to the main store. The mall opens onto a key traffic generator — the central food court — and the KMCC main entrance.

Opening onto the mall are the Shopette — convenient for on-the-go customers — a Book Mark and Café, and a cascade of prestige branded specialty stores. Oakley, Swarovski, and The Body Shop are some of the names familiar to U.S. servicemembers, while Josef Seibel Shoes sells fine handcrafted footwear at a value price.

The beauty shop/spa, barber shop, optical/optometry, and a floral shop; casual dining, and banking and credit union services add functionality and convenience. The mall section is also home to 25 permanent and 15 roving concessionaires specializing in everything from wines, leather goods, to a variety of collectibles and souvenirs.

A trio of special promotional event areas punctuate the concourse, one of which was currently being used for a display contest by Exchange New Car Sales (see *E&C News*, 11/09).

On a second-floor promenade, there's a four-plex movie theater, across from a Harley-Davidson store and the AAFES store administration offices.

A "Window to Rheinland-Pfalz" information center serves patrons wanting to explore the region's attractions.

FOOD ATTRACTIONS

To satisfy the most demanding of appetites, KMCC has put together a menu that marries U.S. favorites with local and world fare. (For more on this, see *E&C News'* upcoming feature on *Name Brand Food Service*.)

HELPING HANDS

"When we were hurting for help, associates and staff jumped in from all over, they came in from as far away as Italy, as near as region headquarters — from all over, to get this regional store up and running, and it's just beautiful," Salvo said. "Some people really wanted to help" the AAFES-Europe Commander explained, "They saw the need, so they asked if they could come down."

Burns concurred, "Everybody comes together in such a way that just astounds me. From the store managers in Europe who are busy running their respective stores but still helping me pull merchandise, to the Europe Region SVP Jack Morris, VP Robert Smith and area managers Tom Gross and Richard Pickering — that in the middle of running a region — are also here to help me plan promotions and coordinate merchandise. And then my store execution staff, headed by our Project Manager John Mamiya, all made you feel that KMCC needs were the priority."

"Store staff and local managers who ran existing facilities did the same thing — came over on their days off, spent half their time at one facility, half their time here — it's just extraordinary, it really is."

From headquarters, the region, the stores and from all the directorates, Sales (SD), Real Estate (RE) and Logistics (LG), "they took a personal interest in this facility," Burns related. "They called me, they emailed me, they asked 'what else can we do to help make your store opening a success?' — I'm humbled by that, truly."

Mamiya, Burns said, "was my





The new Apple concept shop located adjacent to the PowerZone captured AAFES patrons' imagination and interest. Sgt Overturf, USAF, (center) won an iMac in a Grand Opening day contest. Presenting Overturf here prize are, left to right, Dean Aubin, GET Marketing; Julie Bailey of Apple; [Overturf]; sales and merchandising manager/PowerZone Manager Annalisa Bonnato, and Operations Manager Ray Stewart.

POC for anything I needed for the store at headquarters. He coordinated with me, and with Annalisa Bonnato, one of our sales and merchandising managers. She was next to me from day one, opening this facility. She did an amazing job coordinating everything, as well.

"All of my senior managers here were temporarily promoted and running those five stores. Christy Beenenga ran Ramstein Main Store for a few months, and helped me set up the KMCC main store. Again she went above and beyond." Also Chuck Raulerson and Sandra Reed, and operations managers Joe Fischer and Ray Stewart; Project Manger Richard Kourajian; fixture guru Marilyn Massey; local equipment and facilities (E&F) chief Werner Kliesch and Alison Bryan from RE store planning branch.

"Tom, the GM, helped coordinate with headquarters with whatever the store needs were, working with the project manager on-site to come up with resolutions to issues." The GM, Burns explained, "attended the initial meetings to coordinate our vision of the store, what we thought we needed in terms of weeks of stock on hand. He was also instrumental in coordinating with the vendors, the community and the Command."

With such a large project involving just about every headquarters directorate, U.S. Air Forces Europe and Air Force Services Europe, the German government and its construction company LBB, "he took a lot of stress off of me because of all the things he took on to help me and my team be successful opening this store, and I appreciate that."

HURDLES

It is no secret that setting up the retail portion was a challenge of almost epic proportions, and one that essentially took place over about 120 days. The Main Store itself "is a kilometer there and back from the North Court to the South Court.

"On May 15, when we came over and it was just a shell, there were no fixtures. ... It was a huge team effort," Burns explained, "You have to work together ... partner with headquarters, with the buyers, planners and allocators at SD, RE, Store Ops, Giessen DC and Logistics (LG), all of your vendors, and the E&F crew — all the people that build our fix-

tures — you have to collaborate together and time it, so that you meet your weekly stocking schedules.

Challenges were plentiful. "I think that the biggest hurdle was working around our LBB contractors." Unlike a typical store opening, KMCC was a partial turnover scenario. "We were in the building, but so were the contractors. We had to pay sales associates to man a desk from seven a.m. till seven at night. ... While the contractors were there, they needed to be able to work their areas, but we needed to merchandise areas. There were times that the floors had to be repaired because of cracking issues, and the joint work had to

be repaired ... We were actually stocking merchandise as they were laying tiles. Right behind them."

INNOVATIVE METHODS

"We have a breakout by department that shows us what's on every container," Burns explained, "What really has been a big help, that AAFES started doing in the past year, was what we call the planogram in a box. ... Our DC will put all the items that are on that planogram on one tri-wall or one pallet." Everything is numbered by planogram, pallet and location; "it's amazing how quickly it goes up," she said.



An Air Force technical sergeant and his family enjoy a break in shopping in the home office area.

CONTRIBUTION

"I think if anybody was offered the opportunity to open a store, they should jump at it, and be grateful for the opportunity to do it. Though you work long hours, and many days without days off, there's such a sense of satisfaction to know that you contributed to it. ... Everybody's doing it together, but you helped orchestrate it.

"When you open, you know that your efforts have been rewarded when you see the smiles on the patrons faces."

LIFESTYLE CENTER

The individual retail and services sites were once planned to be spread throughout the installation. By bringing them together, 26 acres of land and trees were conserved.

Asked about the 'Lifestyle Center' experience the facility offers, Thurgood responded, "When we think about AAFES in the future, I keep describing this as 'The beginning of the beginning.' As we re-conceptualize and think about the values that we provide going forward — and how important it is that we get this right — KMCC, Kadena AB, Japan, the Lifestyle Centers we're building in the U.S.; the way we're assorting our stores, how we're changing the culture — we can really build a paradigm of customer loyalty."

The AAFES commander has set a goal to go beyond mere customer satisfaction. "I want staff to talk about 'fans,' customers who are loyal. It's very important that we get that right in our overseas stores, because if we get that value proposition correct and we win patrons' hearts with great customer service, we make that emotional link with them, when they come back to the U.S. where they have all kinds of alternatives open to them, they can still come back to AAFES."

There can be little doubt from the comments and smiles recently witnessed and heard from patrons at KMCC — to whom the word "paradigm" may simply equate with a fun day out, and a touch and taste of home — that AAFES has begun to expand its "fan" base overseas.

—E&C News