

AAFES-Backed Gift Cards Deliver Support and Peace of Mind During Tumultuous Times

Retailers and gift card suppliers closing their doors have left thousands of Americans holding millions of dollars of worthless pre-paid plastic. Soldiers and Airmen even experienced a scare last month when a gift certificate vendor of the Department of Defense's oldest and largest exchange service, the Army & Air Force Exchange Service, shuttered its doors and advised recipients that they could "remit" their gifts for "potential reimbursement."

"AAFES was already in the process of transitioning to an AAFES-backed gift card, so honoring the defunct gift certificates was a fairly easy decision to make," said AAFES' Senior Enlisted Advisor Chief Master Sgt. Jeffry Helm. "The DoD actually authorized AAFES to sell gift cards directly to any American, on behalf on military families, last October As a result, AAFES now offers gift cards without a need for third party fulfillment."

The differences between a run-of-the-mill retailer's gift card and AAFES-back gift cards are numerous.

For starters, exchange gift cards can be redeemed just about anywhere on the planet as AAFES operates BXs and PXs in some 30 countries. In fact, AAFES currently operates 89 exchanges throughout the Middle East, including 59 locations in Iraq alone. This means that even in a war zone, a Soldier, Airman, Sailor or Marine can redeem an exchange gift card for just about anything and, because AAFES operates thousand of facilities, including fast food restaurants, movie theaters and gas stations, the recipient has the power to choose what product or service best meets their needs.

Sending an AAFES gift card is affordable. Today, any American can log on to www.aafes.org, choose from denominations ranging from \$10 to \$500, send a card to an individual or charity and regardless where the card is going, the sender incurs absolutely not additional "convenience" or "shipping" charges.

Finally, and probably most importantly in light of the economy, AAFES gift cards are backed by the strength of a nearly 114-year old military command.

"When you buy a gift card, you're taking a gamble that the retailer will be open when the recipient decides to redeem it," said Helm. "As we've seen over the course of the past few months, almost any business can be forced to close up shop due to sudden and catastrophic economic hardship. Fortunately, people who choose to send an AAFES gift card don't have to worry because whether the card is brought in tomorrow or next year, we'll be where our troops are; delivering a taste of home to those far from the comforts of

friends and family”

AAFES gift cards and gift certificates, up to \$500, can be sent by any American who logs on to www.aafes.org or calls 877-770-4438. From there, BX/PX gift certificates are sent to individual service members (designated by the purchaser) or distributed to “any service member” through the Air Force Aid Society, American Red Cross, Fisher House Foundation Inc., Navy-Marine Corps Relief, USO or Soldiers Family Assistance Center.