

## Supporting America's Veterans and Caregivers



**I**n late May, James Leahy celebrated his first anniversary as chief operating officer (COO) of the Veterans Canteen Service (VCS). With a more than 40-year career that has spanned both the civilian sector and the canteen service, Leahy has not only helped orchestrate the transformation of the “canteens” of yore into today’s PatriotStores, but also spearheaded the evolution of the VCS Enterprise into a 21st-century retail operation. In this interview, Leahy talks about where the VCS is going, and where it plans to take customers on its latest retail journey.

**E and C News:** What are some of the advantages of the newest generations of VCS PatriotStores? Are they working out as expected and are any tweaks planned?

**James Leahy:** The store environment is extremely important for our patrons. For PatriotStore customers this means being able to navigate through wider aisles, shopping with enhanced signage that assists in faster decision-making at the point of purchase, and most importantly, shopping in an environment that meets the VCS mission of providing “comfort and well-being for America’s Veterans.”

Our bright, modern, and warm design is creating a positive impact on how our customers think and feel in a health-care, hospital environment.

**E and C News:** What are some of the upcoming new constructions or renovations of VCS PatriotStores?

**Leahy:** We have now completed over 75 retail renovations to the PatriotStore “New Look,” and the response from the customer has been incredible, with comments on the cleaner, more open feel and updated color scheme and marketing.

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Upcoming larger-volume PatriotStore retail renovations for 2016 include stores in Philadelphia, Pa., Dallas, Texas, Decatur, Ga., and many more.

**E and C News:** What is the VCS’s customer base in today’s Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)?

**Leahy:** The “VCS Mission” defines our customer base as the following: “To provide America’s Veterans enrolled in VA’s Health Care System, their families, caregivers, VA employees, volunteers, and visitors reasonably priced merchandise and services essential to their comfort and well-being.”

**E and C News:** How is VCS leveraging manufacturer support and other methods to get the word out about what the canteen service has to offer to all of them?

**Leahy:** In addition to our traditional methods of on-site sales flyers and social media such as Facebook, we have recently upgraded our capabilities in e-mail promotions to customers, and we will be implementing this program in the fall of 2016.

**E and C News:** Which manufacturer/broker/distributor partners have helped support the VCS — including at VCS/VA events — this past year?

**Leahy:** Vendor support of VCS/VA events over the last year has been phenomenal as usual, including Nestlé; Unilever; Acosta; U.S. Sales; Marketing Plus; Get Marketing; K&S Unique; JWM; National Vitamin; Snak Club; Jack Link’s; Mars; GoPro; Fitbit; Garmin; LG; Sony; Samsung; Hisense; and many more.

**E and C News:** What are some of the causes, promotions and activities they have been involved with?

**Leahy:** Examples of support range from voluntary community service at VA Medical Centers and donating player pianos to various VA Medical Centers across the country, to Fisher House donations and donating merchandise and volunteering at VA National Veterans Sports Programs.

VCS could not bring the excitement to our customers in our PatriotStores without the wonderful support of our vendor partners. — E and C NEWS

VCS PHOTOS



The Richmond, Va., PatriotStore exemplifies the “New Look” of the more than 75 recently renovated VCS PatriotStores. These new stores provide customers with a cleaner, more open feel and updated color scheme and marketing.