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CFAY honors African-American contributions throughout history

By Mark Elrod, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) held their African-American History Month celebration at the Chapel of Hope Feb. 4.

The theme for this year is "Quest for Citizenship in the Americas."

"This ceremony was a celebration of African-American History Month, which actually began in 1926 by Carter G. Woodson as National Negro History Week," said Naval Inspector General Vice Adm. Anthony L. Winns, who was the guest speaker for the ceremony. "It's really geared toward everyone. It's not a 'black thing,' nor a 'white thing,' it's for anyone who would like to celebrate African-American History Month and what it means for our nation."

"I hope to let all the attendees know of the accomplishments of many African-Americans in our history," said Winns.

The history of African-Americans in the Navy goes back a few hundred years.

"We are the benefactors of a proud naval heritage," said CFAY Commanding Officer Capt. Daniel L. Weed, during his ceremonial opening remarks. "Colonial, African-American Sailors fought serving our country during our American Revolution and fought for the freedoms that we hold so dear."

"Oppressed and exploited by man and endangered by the seas, African-American seaman struggled to free themselves. They have struggled for a goal. They have conquered prejudice. They have navigated transitions from the rough sea of racial intolerance to the smooth waters of equality, understanding and brotherhood," said Weed.

Each year, U.S. Navy commands observe African-American History Month.

"The ceremonies are held, during the month of February, in various organizations and various commands throughout the United States Navy, said Winns. "It's up to the commanding officer to determine the extent of the program that he or she has."

During the ceremony Winns, as well as other speakers, conveyed the importance of acceptance and understanding amongst all ethnicities and cultures.

"I think diversity makes our nation stronger; it's really great for our Navy," said Winns. "If you look at the great history of our Navy our strength really comes from the people, and the diverse nature of our people is absolutely fantastic, because we have different people from different cultures, different ethnicities that all come together and make our Navy what it ought to be.

Naval Inspector General Vice Adm. Anthony Winns delivers remarks to Sailors, families and guests during CFAYs African-American History Month celebration at the Chapel of Hope Feb. 4.

U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Barry Hirayama

"I think it's important for all Sailors, in our Navy, to practice diversity and to accept the differences of all people. We, in the Navy, are a reflection of society and our society in the United States is diverse. So, we recruit and retain our best and brightest from across America and that 'best and brightest' comes in all flavors and all cultures."

Service members serving overseas are in a unique situation that stateside service members aren't exposed to, or used to.

"Being forward-deployed has a special meaning, because you are in a different culture than the Americans are in the U.S.," said Winns. "You have to be able to deal with others who don't necessarily look like you, so your acceptance of diversity is even more important when you are in a forward-deployed force."

The ceremony was coordinated by the Yokosuka Diversity Empowerment Committee (YDEC), which recently coordinated the Martin Luther King Jr. Unity Walk Jan. 23.

"It is a privilege to be a part of YDEC, because it goes beyond multi-cultural," said Master Chief Information Systems Technician (SW/AW) Shellinda Miller, who delivered a "Tribute to African-American Month" speech during the ceremony. "It's about diversity, empowering everyone in the committee and how we work together to bring our talents and our differences and our skills to educate one another throughout the Yokosuka community."

Contact CFAY Equal Opportunity Advisor Master Chief Boatswain's Mate (SW/SW) Ray Kidd at 243-7085 for more information about YDEC.

VITA program opens for business; makes doing taxes a snap

Story and photo by Dan Bowen, CFAY Public Affairs

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program opened for business in Building A32 aboard Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Feb. 3 and will continue through the beginning of June.

VITA gives Sailors and their family members the ability to get help with their taxes and get their returns done for free by trained volunteers from various commands throughout CFAY.

Navy Legal Service Office (NLSO) Judge Advocate General Lt. j.g. Jesse Adams is serving as the program coordinator this year and believes the program is an excellent asset to the base. "Not only does the VITA tax center allow for Sailors to come in and get the help of professionally trained and certified volunteers; but also, there is a movement towards self-service and we want each Sailor to be competent in preparing their own tax returns," Adams said.

The center is especially useful for forward-deployed members who have circumstances unique to serving overseas. For those members who have foreign spouses, or spouses earning foreign income, it can be a real headache trying to figure out how to get taxes done correctly and on time. Another common issue for Sailors is spouses without social security numbers or who are in the process of applying for an individual taxpayer identification number (ITIN).

"In our case, we can still assist the service member and their foreign-born spouse even if their ITIN is not complete," said Adams. "So we can help them get their ITIN as well as file a 'married filing jointly' tax return so they can kill two birds with one stone."

The tax center is designed to be as convenient, quick and user-friendly as possible. Individuals are only asked to bring the paperwork they will need to complete their returns and fill out a questionnaire when they arrive to the center. The volunteers at the tax center will take it from there.

Postal Clerk Seaman Joshua Barnes from Fleet Mail Center Yokohama made sure to take the time to make the trek down to the center so that he could get his tax return as soon as possible. This is his second year to use the service and he is grateful for the assistance and professionalism the VITA volunteers were able to provide.

VITA volunteer OSC Dean Ireland helps PCSN Joshua Barnes get his taxes done early at the tax center in building A32 Feb.3. The tax center is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., helping Sailors and their family members get through the tax season as painlessly as possible.

"I'm not real computer savvy so I like someone to help me do it; that's why I came over here," said Barnes. "It's a good service, it's fast, easy and all you have to do is bring in your paperwork and they'll get it done for you. It was fast, it only took 25 minutes!"