

First Class Mess repair and donate bikes for people of Tohoku Area  
Mass Communication Specialist Vivian Blakely

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## BICYCLES

NAVAL AIR FACILITY ATSUGI, Japan – On March 11, 2011, a 9.0 earthquake struck the northern part of Japan followed by a major tsunami that wiped away almost everything in its path.

Immediately, donations of food, clothes and blankets streamed in from all over the world for those who now found themselves homeless.

A unique request was made, however, that would make the lives of the people in the Tohoku region a little easier.

“As a First Class Mess, we want to be up for whatever to help out the community,” said Culinary Specialist First Class Chad Skog, Vice President of the First Class Petty Officer’s Mess (FCPOM). “That was one of our goals for this year. We really want to be about community service and giving back and that is what we are really trying to do.”

U.S. Navy installations throughout Japan have been asked to help in the donation of bicycles in an effort that is headed by Mrs. Lydia Rush, spouse of Capt. Peter Rush, Deputy and Chief of Staff, U.S. Naval Forces, Japan. The endeavor is being called the Bike Project.

Members of the FCPOM on Naval Air Facility (NAF) Atsugi have risen to the task.

“It’s for someone who really needs it,” said Utilitiesman First Class Minoru Underhill, Treasurer of the FCPOM. “Someone that could really use the extra hand. It feels great to know that even though we’re so far away, we’re able to lend a hand and help out.”

The project started in July when Rush visited the Tohoku region and asked the family of a friend if anything was needed. “A bike,” was their response.

“Their cars were washed away or damaged,” said Rush. “And they need transportation. Especially the elderly. They have no means of getting around except by walking and where they are placed in shelters is kind of far. To carry groceries, to get their groceries and their essentials, the bikes are really needed.”

On NAF Atsugi, a surprising amount of bikes were donated when the initial request went out. Even security was able to go around to bike racks, collecting bikes that had been abandoned for sometime.

However, not every bike given to the FCPOM was salvageable. The frames and chains were too rusted, the seats were too torn, and the tires too old and worn to be inflated again on some bikes.

“We need some good working bikes so that we can give them to the people who really need them,” said Underhill. “Parts are good too. So if you see us out there, we’re raising funds for these new bikes, please help us out. If you know that you’ve got a bike that is just sitting around, not doing anything and you’re not riding it, you can give it up for a better cause.”

Once donated, the bikes are kept in a shed in the Public Works building.

For two or three hours after work, members of the FCPOM begin to repair the bikes, saving what they can, and discarding what they can’t.

Even giving up a weekend, these few members worked diligently to get what bikes they could in quality working condition.

In NAF Atsugi’s first delivery, eight bikes were inspected and retrieved by Mrs. Rush with more to come.

“It’s just what we should do as First classes and Sailors in the Navy,” said Skog. “Everyone should help out and that’s something we believe as a FCPOM.”

For more information, please contact the Chaplain’s Office at 264-3020.

