

Service Members dedicate time to Elementary School

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ADOPT

NAVAL AIR FACILITY ATSUGI, Japan- Shirley Lanham Elementary School (SLES)'s third grade classes took a tour of the Far East Café on Naval Air Facility (NAF) Atsugi. The third graders were excited for a chance to get to go into the walk-in freezer.

“They all went in and ran right out because it was so cold,” said Culinary Specialist 2nd Class Rodell Hardaway.

The Far East Café invites SLES classes over once a month for a free lunch and chance to see how the galley is run on daily bases.

In the summer 2011, SLES developed the Adopt-a-Grade program to foster volunteerism throughout NAF Atsugi and its tenant commands.

“You adopt a class, you help them out, and show them what your job is,” said Hardaway.

Volunteers may be asked to assist teachers with making copies, passing out food during holiday parties, monitor kids at recess,

participate with Homework Helpers and help out with other school events.

“The kids really like it,” said Quartermaster 2nd Class Heather Veit. “They really enjoy having visitors come”

“I think it is a great partnership,” said Rheamia Burns, Children and Youth Program (CYP) School Liaison Officer. “[It’s] a great way for the military to get involved,”

Each command has a liaison or coordinator who responds to the e-mails from the lead SLES teacher of their assigned grade and responds by organizing volunteers to meet the needs requested in the e-mails.

“The teacher would e-mail me and let me know what events they had coming up and then I would send out a massive e-mail to the department,” said Veit. “Then the volunteers would e-mail me and I’d e-mail the teacher and let her know who was coming for the week.”

“Normally,” said Machinery Repairman 1st Class Francisco Barrera. “There is a meeting hosted by one of the lead teachers, whoever is leading the event, and we get instruction on what is going to take place,”

Commands can take the initiative and organize special events such as inviting the students to see what they do in their jobs or having demonstrations at the school.

“We go over there [to the school] and give demonstrations on how to fry Oreos, fry Twinkies and things like that,” said Hardaway.

The Adopt-a-Grade program has allowed for bigger events to be organized on base such as the SLES Spring Carnival, Let’s Go on a Make Believe Deployment and Field Days.

“I think it’s awesome,” said Burns. “They are definitely going above and beyond here on this base.”

“Its kind of a way to give back the community,” said Veit, “Especially since we are in Japan and it’s harder to get out and volunteer out in town.”

SLES honors the volunteers for each event and the time they spend assisting the students by presenting them with certificates.

“We want to recognize the service members for their hard work,” said Burns.

The students from SLES also show their appreciation to the volunteers for their time through hand drawn thank you cards and posters.

Hardaway said that the Far East Café has made space to display all for the unique art work from the children.

“We got a [wall] just dedicated to the third graders with thank you cards and everything they’ve given for us,” said Hardaway.