Volunteers: Backbone of Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society services

By Lisa Aszklar,
Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society

Since its beginning in 1904, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS) has relied on its volunteers to achieve the organization's goal of helping Sailors and Marines meet unforeseen financial emergencies and manage their resources. In fact, since it was founded, NMCRS has seen its volunteer roster expand from 19 to more than 3,500, both ashore and afloat - a jump reflecting the increased demand for the Society's services.

But if you think volunteering for NMCRS involves only stuffing envelopes and answering phones, you couldn't be more mistaken.

NMCRS volunteers come from all walks of life and have a rainbow of different types of skills to offer. Ages range from six to 106, and each person is valued for the particular talents they have to offer. The surprise, claims NMCRS Director of Volunteer Support Barb Sheffer, is how wonderfully diverse those talents are, and how both the organization and the volunteer benefit.

"Volunteers bring their own thought patterns, their own strengths, and a new vision," she said. "Having that diversity only helps us serve the client better."

For instance, sometimes a volunteer in their 20s can relate better to a client of same age, just as the volunteer, who is the spouse of a service member with years of active duty to their credit, can better understand a situation faced by the widow of a Sailor or Marine. It's all about empowerment and matching the skills to the client's needs, according to Sheffer.

"We provide our volunteers with the tools and training to do the job that fulfills their desire to serve helping others," said Sheffer. "Coordinating the mission with the skill set is so important to helping our volunteers reach their own goals - whether it's building another skill for their résumé, gaining the confidence needed for a future job interview, doing something of value or making a difference in the lives of our Sailors and Marines."

The benefit to the Society, Sheffer says, is immeasurable.

"Volunteers are helping to keep us current by bringing the latest life skills to the workplace. Our volunteer workforce is leading us in directions our founders never anticipated," added Sheffer. "Those skill sets help us stay relevant to the service member by allowing us to meet them where they are. In a very real way, our volunteers help us see and prepare for the future!"

Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society staff and volunteer members pose for a group photo during their quarterly team building trip at the Morinaga Chocolate Factory in Yokohama, Japan, Feb. 14.

Photo by Christina Sexstella

According to Sheffer, 25 years ago, no one had ever heard of e-mail. Now, the Society utilizes social media outlets such as FaceBook, Twitter and YouTube to reach clients and stay current. Today's volunteers are also more mobile and adept at multi-functioning, which has changed the way NMCRS conveys its message.

"'Virtual Volunteering' is our new love! It is one of the options open to the Society as we aim to reach and serve our target population," she said.

The result is a dedicated cadre of individuals who have embraced the organization and its mission, resulting in a razor-sharp focus on Sailors, Marines and their families.

Society president Steve Abbot perhaps best sums up the value NMCRS places on its volunteer staff when he said, "The tradition of caring for and serving others has been passed from generation to generation of Society volunteers, and volunteers remain the heart of our organization."

Contact your local NMCRS Office today for more information. You too can make a difference.

ARC Yokosuka collects donations for earthquake, tsunami victims

By MC2(SW/AW) John Smolinski, CFAY Public Affairs

The American Red Cross (ARC) Yokosuka Branch located on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka collected monetary donations to go to relief efforts for the victims of the earthquake and tsunami that occurred in northern Japan March 11.

Since the disaster hit more than a month ago, the ARC Yokosuka has been collecting donations to give to the Japanese people in need.

"We have received donations totaling $33,408 to support the Japanese earthquake and tsunami relief efforts," said ARC Yokosuka Senior Station Manager Cecil Goodman.

The Red Cross uses donations saved in reserve to quickly respond to natural disasters.

"When this disaster first began, the American Red Cross provided $10,000 to the Japanese Red Cross," said Goodman. "Since then, people began sending in donations to the American Red Cross."

The Red Cross offers many different services including disaster relief services.

"What we do is provide people a place to go to our website and submit online donations, mail-in donations or even text donations to us," said Goodman. "People also came into our office and made donations in person, and we then send those funds to the Red Cross disaster headquarters."

The demand for places to donate was so great that they set up a station outside their office to help those who wanted to give.

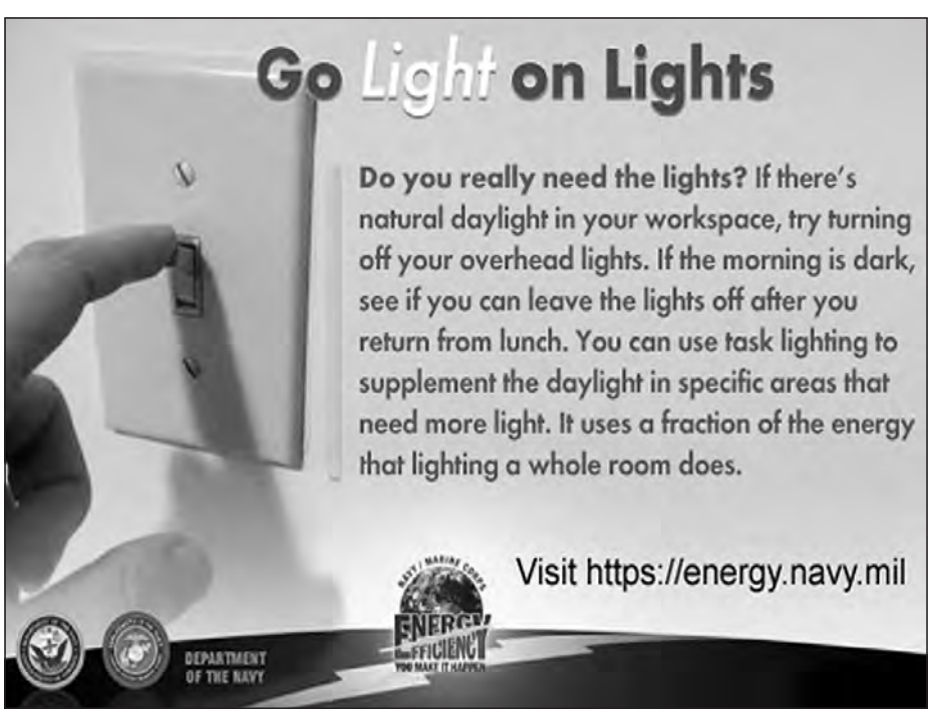
"CFAY Command Master Chief [Gregory] Vadaurri suggested that we set up a table at the commissary to collect donations there," said Goodman. "In two days, before the voluntary departures, we collected $11,000 from people just going into the store. After the departure, those who stayed still continued to come into the office to make donations."

Raising money for those affected by the earthquake and tsunami has been a community effort.

"The response has been very significant in that I have received a lot of e-mails where people wanted to help and give to the victims… I'm just so impressed by how giving people are," said Goodman. "We had three Japanese ladies come in the office with a big container full of yen and dollars that they collected to donate to the relief efforts."

The Yokosuka Red Cross was also able to help their counterparts outside of the gates.

"We had the opportunity to help the Kinugasa Red Cross who was holding a fundraiser at the JR [train] station," said Goodman. "One of the volunteers here and I were able to help accept donations for the Japanese Red Cross."



Pet of the Week

Big Boy is this week's Pet of the Week. Big Boy is a former stray, but he loves people and attention, as you can see. He has had a tough life and is missing a fang, which gives him an adorable smile. He'd do well in any home where there are no other cats. Big Boy is a sweet, handsome fellow and will be a great house cat. To find out more about Big Boy or any animal at Pets Are Worth Saving (P.A.W.S.), contact them at 243-9996, by e-mail to usskittytalk.yokosuka@gmail.com or visit the P.A.W.S. website at www.pawsyokosukajapan.com.

Photo courtesy of P.A.W.S.