American Red Cross month promotes organization, raises funds

Story and photo by Mark Elrod, CFAY Public Affairs

March is national Red Cross Month and a time to highlight the impact that the American Red Cross (ARC) has had on the United States.

According to its website, for 130 years the ARC has been providing people with CPR and water safety education, food, shelter and emotional support as well as supplying blood and blood products to thousands of hospitals throughout the country.

For the first 25 years of its existence, ARC, the largest nonprofit humanitarian organization in the nation, did not hold any regular fund raising events. Instead, the organization mainly relied upon publicity and spontaneous support from people who learned of tragedies via word-of-mouth and newspapers.

However, when the United States entered World War I in April 1917, President Woodrow Wilson ordered the ARC to raise funds to support military aid which was mandated by the Red Cross Congressional charter, which was established in 1900. ARC responded to the order by raising $115 million.

Approximately, eight months later, the organization held its first Christmas Roll Call, this allowed people to join the organizational register for the cost of a dollar. After the war, ARC decided to make Roll Call an annual event until it was discontinued in 1943. Instead, the ARC spoke with President Theodore Roosevelt, who was the honorary chairman of the ARC, and Roosevelt declared the month of March as Red Cross Month.

During the first Red Cross Month, the ARC set a goal to raise $125 million, and exceeded it by raising $164 million, a feat Roosevelt referred to as " ...the greatest single crusade of mercy in all of history."

Since then, Red Cross Month has been held annually for the organization to conduct volunteer and fund-raising efforts. The theme for this year is "Join Us," according to American Red Cross Yokosuka Station Manager Cecil Goodman.

"People can get involved to help us help other members of the community, whether they are providing a donation to support our cause, or they join us by volunteering, or giving blood, or taking the Red Cross courses, which help train people to save lives," said Goodman.

(Left) American Red Cross Yokosuka Station Volunteer Pat Goodman discusses local programs with a member of the CFAY community during a promotional event in the red brick area in front of the commissary March 11. March is national Red Cross Month and a time to highlight the impact that the American Red Cross (ARC) has had on the United States and throughout the world.

Throughout history, it's the volunteers that helped the ARC in relief efforts during the Mississippi River flooding of '27, the "Dust Bowl" era of the '30s, the Ohio River flooding of '37 and recently with huricaine Katrina relief efforts.

"Emergency response organizations like the American Red Cross play a vital role in relief operations by deploying scores of volunteers to rebuild communities hit by disaster and by providing critical support and resources at home and abroad," stated President Barrack Obama in his 2011 Red Cross Month Proclamation. "When a devastating earthquake struck Haiti last year, the American people responded with an outpouring of compassion, prompting an unprecedented international response and relief effort by the American Red Cross. These efforts reflect our country's noblest ideals, and they contribute to a climate of international trust and cooperation."

ARC Yokosuka Station volunteers help out at approximately 16 different facilities here, such as U.S. Naval Hospital (USNH) Yokosuka, The Sullivans Elementary school, base libraries and the Red Cross Office.

According to Goodman, volunteer duties do more than just help organizations; they help to develop job skills, such as clerical, and customer service skills.

Each March the ARC Yokosuka Station holds events to help promote its volunteers and its services. On March 11, the Yokosuka Station held an event at the red brick area in front of the commissary to promote the services it provides, to encourage people to volunteer and donate to the organization and on March 18 they held an event at USNH Yokosuka to promote volunteer opportunities at the hospital.

Also, according to Goodman, during the Yokosuka Spring Festival open base event March 27, the organization will set up a booth to sell items, the proceeds of which will go to supporting Red Cross programs, such as pre-deployment briefings, health and safety classes and the Dental Assistant Program.

All-in-all, Red Cross volunteers might come away from the experience feeling a sense of satisfaction in their efforts.

"If it wasn't a great organization doing great things to help people, I wouldn't be a part of it," said Goodman. "I started out 25 years ago, when I was on active duty, and I got hooked and I just continued, because I could see what [the organization] does to help people.

"I encourage other individuals to get involved, because they can help other people, while they are helping themselves. They can learn a trade or skills... that they can use somewhere else. So, it's a great thing to do, to volunteer," Goodman said.

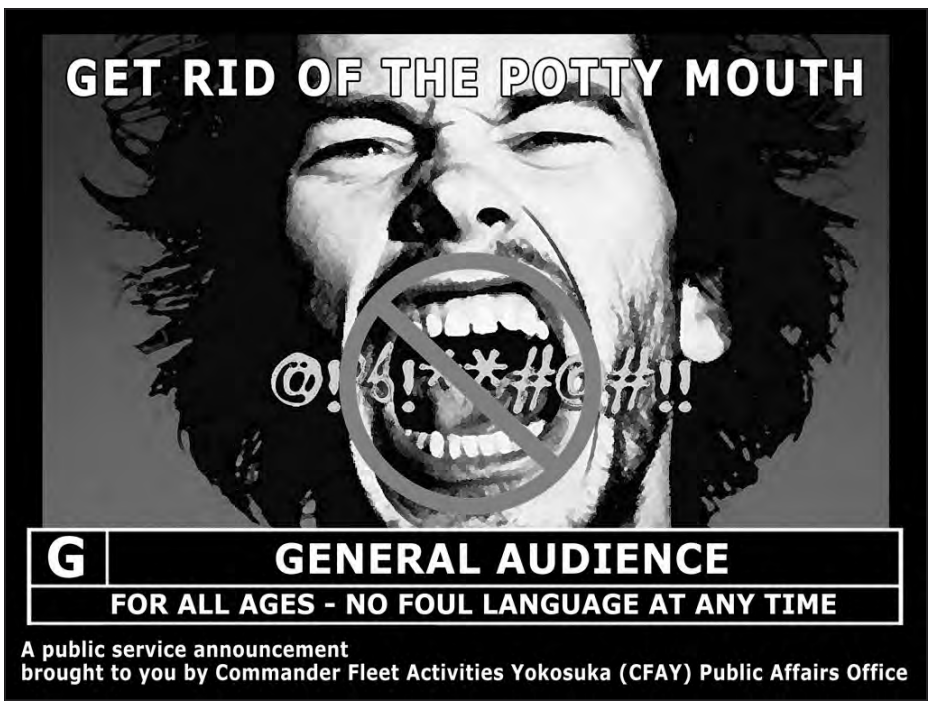
To inquire about donations, volunteering or the programs offered locally, contact the ARC Yokosuka Station at 243-7490. For more information about the ARC visit their website at www.redcross.org.

The editor asks:

"***Did you know***, March is National Women's History Month? As recently as the 1970s, women's history was virtually an unknown topic in kindergarten through 12th-grade school curriculum or in general public consciousness. To address this situation, the Education Task Force of the Sonoma County, Calif. Commission on the Status of Women initiated a "Women's History Week" celebration for 1978.

President Jimmy Carter issued the first presidential proclamation declaring the week of March 8, 1980 as National Women's History Week. Each year, the dates changed and every year a new lobbying effort was needed.

In 1987, Congress declared March as National Women's History Month in perpetuity. A special presidential proclamation is issued every year which honors the extraordinary achievements of American women."



Pet of the Week

The Pet of the Week this week is Mr. Speckles. He came to us as a stray but you'd never know it. He is microchipped and declawed and is sweet as honey. He is friendly and has adjusted well in our cat room. He would do well in any home! To find out more about Mr. Speckles 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.