Yokosuka Seabee caps 21-year career with retirement ceremony

Story and photo by Yasuko Nakamura, NAVFAC Far East Public Affairs

Public Works Department (PWD) Yokosuka Self-Help Project Supervisor and Assistant Public Works Officer Senior Chief Builder (SCW) Eric L. Tapia capped a successful 21-year career as a Seabee with his retirement ceremony at the PWD Yokosuka Self-Help facility on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) July 16.

"Today, we are gathered here to pay a special tribute to Senior Chief Tapia and his family upon his retirement following 21years of stellar Navy service," said Yokosuka Public Works Officer Cmdr. Tim DeWitt during his opening remarks. "We are also gathered to say 'thank you' to his family. We know that you, more than any of us, are vividly aware of the sacrifices your husband, your father and our service members made for our country."

During the ceremony, Tapia was awarded his second Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal for his outstanding performance while serving as construction project manager and assistant public works officer (APWO) for PWD Yokosuka from August 2007 to July 2010.

According to the award citation, he "managed 27 diverse construction contracts with a total value of $13 million - including the highly visible and timely renovation of a 35,000 square-foot warehouse in support of the arrival of *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) to Japan. As APWO he provided phenomenal facility support for Yokosuka's operational command and staff tenants resulting in $55 million worth of sustainment, restoration and modernization projects for Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka fiscal year 2011 maintenance execution plan."

"It has been a long adventure and it's been great," Tapia said of his naval career. "I have met people around the world. I will miss the camaraderie, especially. I'll miss all those guys... all the training, all the days in the field. There is no way to say how much I am going to miss that.

"To the young Seabees out there, us old salts will talk about the 'good old days' – the good old days weren't always the present days, so when you look back on your time, to this day, it'll be the good old days – remember that."

During his concluding remarks, Tapia emotionally quoted John F. Kennedy, whom he stated as one of his favorite presidents.

"I can imagine no more rewarding a career. And any man who may be asked in this century what he did to make his life worthwhile, I think I can respond with a good deal of pride and satisfaction: I served in the United States Navy."

Tapia was born in Las Vegas, New Mexico, and joined the New Mexico National Guard in 1981. In 1989 he enlisted in the U.S. Navy and attended boot camp at Navy Recruit Training Command Orlando, Fla., followed by Builder 'A' School in Gulfport, Miss. His initial assignment was with Navy Mobile Construction Battalion (NMCB) 1, out of Gulfport, Miss. His follow-on tours included PWD Naval Facility Argentia, Newfoundland, Canada, Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla., NMCB 4 (deploying to Puerto Rico, Okinawa, Korea, Iceland and Camp Fuji, Japan), Fleet Industrial Supply Center, Yokosuka, Japan, NMCB 5 (deploying toTaji, Iraq and as an individual augmentee to Tanzania, Africa) and on to his final assignment as PWD Yokosuka Self-Help project supervisor and assistant public works officer.

(Left) PWD Yokosuka Self-Help Project Supervisor and Assistant Public Works Officer BUCS(SCW) EricTapia is awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal (gold star in lieu of second award) by NAVFAC FE Commanding Officer Capt. Robert McLean during his retirement ceremony at the PWD Yokosuka Self-Help facility July 16.

DoD to resume restructured Military Spouse Career Program

By Elaine Wilson,
American Forces Press Service

The Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA) program will resume Oct. 25, but with some significant changes to the popular spouse employment program, the Department of Defense (DoD) announced July 20.

Changes include a reduction in the amount of financial aid, a change in the population eligible to receive that aid – from all military spouses to spouses of junior service members - and more robust counseling services.

These changes bring the program, commonly known as MyCAA, back to its original intent of equipping military spouses of junior service members with portable careers, such as in real estate or health care. The program was launched in November 2007 for spouses of junior service members, and was expanded to all pay grades and programs of study in March 2009.

"We're trying to empower, to give spouses in particular, an opportunity to be immediately impactful as soon as they get into a community," said Clifford Stanley, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness. "We want to make sure they have opportunities to work when they get to a new duty station."

Officials temporarily halted the program Feb. 16, pending a top-to-bottom review, after an enrollment surge overwhelmed the system and caused the program to nearly reach its budget threshold. In March, with the review still under way, officials resumed the program for the more than 136,000 spouses who already had established an account.

According to Stanley, the review took time, but officials wanted to ensure they could sustain the program for the long-term, particularly in light of fiscal realities the government is facing.

"We want to help people be employed, but at the same time we have to be cost conscious," he said. "The aim is to sustain the program, we don't want to start it and stop it. This is something we want to continue because it's important to take care of our families and our spouses."

The previous program offered all spouses of active duty service members a lifetime benefit of $6,000 to be used for education purposes.

Under the new parameters, spouses of junior service members can apply for a maximum financial benefit of $4,000 for up to three years from the start date of the first class, with a $2,000 annual cap. Spouses pursuing licenses or certifications requiring an up-front fee of greater than $2,000 may apply for a waiver of the annual cap up to the maximum benefit of $4,000.

Financial aid will be limited to spouses of active duty service members in pay grades E-1 to E-5, W-1 to W-2 and O-1 to O-2, as well as the spouses of activated guard and reserve members within those ranks. Spouses of guard and reserve members must be able to start and complete their courses while their sponsor is on Title 10 orders.

"Those spouses eligible to receive aid can use the money to fund associate's degrees, licenses and certification programs, not higher degrees. The program wasn't intended to support bachelor's and master's degrees," Stanley said. "However, spouses pursuing higher degrees can explore a plethora of other education opportunities, such as scholarships, federal grants and the [Post 9/11] G.I. Bill, with the help from Military OneSource consultants."

See ***MYCAA***, pg. 9