Negishi community celebrates Bon Odori

Story and Photo by Paul Long, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY), Yokohama Detachment, locally known as Negishi, hosted its 46th Annual Bon Odori festival Aug. 27 on the grounds of the housing area. More than 3,600 Japanese guests joined Negishi residents for the festivities.

Naka Ward (the geo-political area that Negishi lies in) Director General Koichi Makino said, "I would like to wish that Negishi and our local community to continue deepen their relationships through this Bon Odori festival."

Makino and Lt.Asa Kim, Negishi officer-in-charge, both expressed their condolences for the victims of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami during their opening statements.

"I hope and wish for their continued speedy recovery," Kim said.

7th Fleet Band's Far East Edition, Morale, Welfare, and Recreation's (MWR) ARJAM Band, the Hongo Ohyashi, and the Sagami Dragon Drummers provided the musical entertainment for the festival.

MWR also provided game tents and inflatable rides for smaller children.

Hibiki Watanabe, from Yokohama, said the live music is what he appreciated the most. "I enjoyed the (7th Fleet's) band. I thought I was listening to a CD, not a live band. I especially enjoyed the Michael Jackson medley of songs that they played."

Festival attendees were treated to a mixture of Japanese and American cuisine, provided by local vendors, (MWR) concessionaires and several CFAY community groups.

Chiho and Orie Iwase, also from Yokohama, brought their two small children to participate in the festivities. "It was our first time here. It's a lot of fun and we wanted to experience a little bit of America. We got to eat ribs, wings, turkey legs and shaved ice. It was a lot of fun," said Chiho Iwase.

MU3 Gabriel Brown, lead singer of the Far East Edition, serenades a local Japanese girl, with Bruno Mars' "Just The Way You Are." Brown's Far East Edition was just one of the musical groups that played during the 46th Negishi Bon Odori Aug. 27.

Watanabe also said, "I wish there were more of these events so that Americans and Japanese can interact with each other."

According to nihonsun.com, an online culture and travel website, Bon Odori is a Japanese Buddhist Folk Dance performed outdoors and danced in concentric circles around a raised platform called a Yagura.

Late July and early August is the time when Japanese honor their ancestors with Obon festivals and Bon Odori (Bon Dances).

The festival's origins date back to 657 AD, from a tale of a monk named Mokuren.

While meditating one day, Mokuren, a Buddhist monk, saw his mother suffering whenever she touched food, it would ignite into flames.

Mokuren grew sad and confused and wept for his poor mother. Upon his distress he thought it best to consult with Shakyamuni Buddha for advice.

Shakyamuni explains that Mokuren's mother's state was caused by the selfishness of her deeds in order to help Mokuren grow up, and he cannot save his mother, only ease her pain. However, Mokuren may save his mother by compelling a journey to sacred priests.

He appealed to Buddha to save his mother from starvation in the Hell of Hungry Ghosts. Buddha instructed Mokuren to offer food to his fellow monks, and he complied, freeing his mother and seven generations of his family from suffering.

It is not really known the origins of O'Bon or Bon Odori, however sources indicate that the festival may have originated from the Buddhist Urabon-kyo.

This Sutra features the story of a monk named Mokuren, who by reaching a higher state of enlightenment was able to comunicate with Buddha directly.

After making offerings to the preists and completeion of his journey, Mokuren realizes that he was not only able to save his mother, but others trapped in the Hell of Hungry Ghosts.

Happily, Mokuren dances upon the salvation of his mother. This dance came later to be known as Bon Odori.

Energy conservation tips to avoiding rolling blackouts

By Thomas Bawden, CFAY Energy Manager, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Far East

The following are recommended steps to reduce peak electricity demand for home and office. Most of us probably know these, but at times we are busy and can easily forget. Post this on the refrigerator and in a handy location at the office. All of us who live both on base and off base are on the same team in the same situation and need to do our part to help avoid summer time blackouts.

• Do not run washer, dryer or dishwasher between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. on weekdays. Using them on weekends during the day is fine.

• Use specific task lighting rather than lighting a whole room, or use natural daylight when you can. This will save power, and unnecessary extra lights just add extra heat to your home or office.

• Run your air conditioner (A/C) only at the Navy mandated set point of 78°F (25.5°C) or warmer temperature for self-controlled units which have thermostats. If this feels insufficient, using a fan to circulate air will help you feel cooler.

• Close all drapes or blinds on any sun-facing exposures to conserve the cooler air in your home and office so your A/C unit will not need to work even harder and consume more electricity.

• Close the door to any rooms in your quarters or space that you are not using or use only sparingly. Do waste electricity cooling a space that you aren't using.

• When leaving your quarters, turn off all lights and appliances. Turn A/C to higher temperature setting of 84°F (29°C) when you leave the house.

• Open any windows at night and early morning, and any time outside air is cooler. Let nature help you cool your space for free.

• Use caution not to operate too many large power-consuming appliances at the same time. Turn off what you can while you aren't using them. Peak demand is the highest total amount of power we use at the same time.

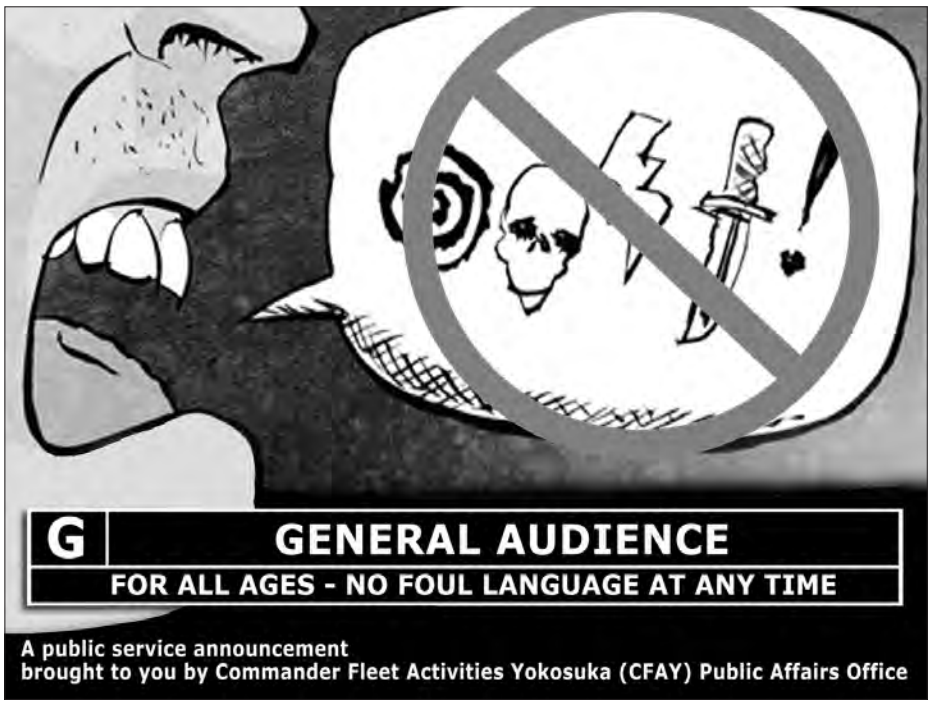
• Turn your computer and monitor off when leaving the home or office for long periods. ONE-Net can turn your office computer on remotely to run any security patches at night when they need to. If leaving for lunch or a long meeting, turn off your monitor.

• Unplug any mobile phone chargers or appliances when not using them. Even if turned off, any items that are plugged in will consume electricity - we refer to these as phantom loads. Any appliances with a remote control - such as televisions, game players, stereos and et cetera really consume extra power, without you noticing.

• Make sure your freezer is defrosted. A frosted-up freezer requires more energy to operate.

• Clean any grime and dust from the coils on the back of your refrigerator. This will allow your refrigerator to operate more efficiently, using less electricity.

• This would be a great time for a summer barbecue. Cooking inside with your electric stove uses a lot of electricity and it creates extra heat inside your house.

• Let your leftovers cool on your counter before putting them in the refrigerator or freezer. Your refrigerator will need to work harder if you put away food that is still hot. Similarly, thaw frozen foods before cooking to save energy.

We all must do our part to avoid summer time rolling blackouts and to assist our host country Japan on its road to recovery.