Celebrities greet fans, sign autographs during visit

Story and photo by Jeffrey C. Doepp, CFAY Public Affairs

Retired Major League Baseball (MLB) pitcher Randy Johnson and movie and television actor Dennis Haysbert met with fans and signed autographs during their visit at the James D. Kelly Fleet Recreation Center on board Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Oct. 11.

Prior to the start of the USO-CFAY Morale, Welfare and Recreation co-sponsored meet and greet at the fleet recreation center, Johnson and Haysbert met briefly with CFAY Commanding Officer Capt. David Owen.

"There are a lot of people who are very excited that you are here," said Owen during a conversation with the two celebrities in his office. "The community has been talking about both of you on our Facebook page, so I think you will have a great turnout at the gymnasium today."

A five-time Cy Young award-winning pitcher, Johnson played for more than 20 years for such teams as the Seattle Mariners, the 2001 World Series champion Arizona Diamondbacks and the New York Yankees. Johnson, who is no stranger to traveling overseas, visited Japan during an MLB tour in the 90s and visited Iraq and Kuwait last year with the USO.

"Last year I was asked by a good friend of mine if I wanted to go on a USO trip to Iraq and Kuwait," Johnson said. "The trip this year came up and they asked if I would like to go to Okinawa and other bases in Japan. This is a great opportunity for me to meet service members and their families, shake their hands and say 'hello,' and let them know I'm thinking about them."

Haysbert is an American film and television actor. He is best known for portraying baseball player Max 'Hammer' Dubois in the 1992 movie "Mr. Baseball," baseball player Pedro Cerrano in the "Major League" film trilogy, President David Palmer on the television series "24" and Sergeant Major Jonas Bane on the television drama "The Unit."

"I've been loving him since '24' when he was President David Palmer," said Maija Winesberry of Haysbert after being one of the first in line to meet the two celebrities. "I don't watch a lot of TV but I'm familiar with many of his movies and roles. He once appeared in an episode of the 'A-Team' in 1983."

While the visit occurred when most of the Yokosuka forward-deployed ships were underway, there were still more than 200 Sailors and family members who stood in line at the recreation center gymnasium waiting to meet the celebrities.

(Left) Maija Winesberry gets a signed baseball from retired MLB player Randy Johnson while well known American film and television actor Dennis Haysbert looks on during a meet and greet at the James D. Kelly Fleet Recreation Center Oct. 11. Johnson and Haysbert are on a USO tour visiting service members and their families throughout Okinawa and Japan.

"I'm a big Yankees fan and a big Randy Johnson fan," said Airman Brian Fazio. "The fact that I only arrived here in Japan three months ago, I think this is great. I want to get his autograph for myself and my uncle, who is also a Johnson fan."

Although Winesberry isn't necessarily a baseball fan, she is originally from Seattle, and a big fan of former baseball star Johnson.

"I remember him pre-mullet cut and enjoyed watching him pitch," she added. "The fact that he is tall – I have two brothers who are 6 (foot) 8 (inches) and so, I remember him being tall, taller then the average baseball player."

First Lady announces hiring commitment for spouses, vets

By Lisa Daniel, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON – First Lady Michelle Obama, on a visit to Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va., announced Oct. 19 a private sector hiring commitment of 25,000 military spouses and veterans as part of the Joining Forces campaign.

Some 270 companies represented by the American Logistics Association for doing business in military resale and morale, welfare, and recreation, have committed to hiring 25,000 military spouses and veterans in the next two years.

The commitment is the largest yet toward President Barack Obama's challenge for the private sector to hire 100,000 military spouses and veterans by 2013.

"They do not want to miss out on your potential," Obama said to a cheering audience inside the 94th Fighter Squadron's hangar. "They want American businesses to have the best, most-talented, most hard-working employees around."

The commitment came from diverse companies, she said, ranging from the corporate behemoths Procter & Gamble, Tyson Foods and Hewlett-Packard, to smaller companies such as Prime Time Services, which plans to hire hundreds of military spouses and veterans within the next year.

According to Obama, some hiring efforts already have begun with Siemens, Sears, K-Mart and Sam's Club, and through Chamber of Commerce job fairs.

"These are bold commitments, and these are companies that are making these pledges not just because it's the right thing to do or because it feels patriotic," she said. "They're also doing it because it's good for their bottom line ... because they know that veterans and military spouses, like all of you here today, represent the best our country has to offer. And they want you on their team."

The first lady then introduced the president, saying his presence shows what "a huge deal" the announcement is. The president thanked the troops for their service.

"Your generation has earned a special place in America's history," he said. He noted that many of the 3 million post-9/11 veterans "have taken their leadership experience, their mastery of cutting edge technologies, their ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and they've become leaders here at home."

They've become leaders at businesses all across the country. However, the Obamas said, many military spouses and veterans struggle to find good employment.

"The truth is that sometimes employers may not always know about all that you have to offer," the first lady said. "They might have trouble understanding a military resumé, or they might see a spouse who's lived in five cities in seven years as a red flag, rather than a reality of military life."

"It doesn't make sense," the president said. "If you can save a life in Afghanistan, you can save a life in a local hospital or in a local ambulance. If you can oversee millions of dollars of assets in Iraq, you can help a business balance its books here at home. If you can juggle the demands of raising a family while a husband or wife are at war, you can juggle any demands of any job in the United States of America."

In announcing the initiative, the first lady said the administration wants to raise awareness that many important job skills – time management, organization, people skills, and complex decision-making – are "second nature" to military spouses and veterans.

"That is really the reason why we're here today, because those are precisely the skills that we need in workplaces across America," she said. We want America to know that you're veterans who have completed missions with enough variables involved to make most people's heads spin; that you're trained in state-of-the-art technologies; that you've managed dozens if not hundreds of your peers; and when the stakes are the highest, that's when you're at your best."

The American Logistics Association represents the largest consumer packaged goods companies in the United States, including major manufacturers such as Coca-Cola, Unilever and ConAgra, along with a multitude of specialty suppliers to the on-base military consumer channel, according to its president, Pat Nixon, a Vietnam War veteran who took part in a White House conference call with reporters yesterday. The Joining Forces campaign is just one of the programs designed to help put veterans and separating Sailors to work including those affected by the Enlisted Retention Board.