Fleet Activities, Yokosuka, Japan

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Tree lighting ceremony illuminates start of holiday season

Story and photo by Tony Hill, CFAY Public Affairs

The holiday season officially kicked off on Yokosuka base when Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY), Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) Department hosted a tree lighting ceremony at the red-brick area in front of the commissary Dec. 1.

The fifth annual event here was held simultaneously with tree lighting ceremonies at the Negishi and Ikego housing detachments.

"Every year, MWR constructs several 25-foot holiday trees throughout Yokosuka base and its Negishi and Ikego housing detachments to help spread the holiday spirit," said MWR Yokosuka Director Paul Lopez. "Then, on Dec. 1, we coordinate separate ceremonies at all three sites to illuminate the trees at the same time."

CFAY Commanding Officer Capt. David Owen took part in the festivities at Yokosuka while Lt. Asa Kim and Chief Master-at-Arms Ronald Jones, officers in charge of the Negishi and Ikego housing detachments respectively, took part in their own on-location events.

"I want to welcome you all to this year's tree lighting ceremony," said Owen. "As we wait here for Santa and Mrs. Claus to come out and turn on the tree lights around the base, I want to take this time to remind you all to be especially safe while enjoying the holidays this season."

According to Lopez, the ceremony is a collaborative CFAY event with contributions from MWR, Navy Exchange (NEX), Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA), and the Commander 7th Fleet Band, and provides a beginning of the holiday season for the Yokosuka community.

"There were cookies and hot cocoa provided by DeCA, prize giveaways from the NEX and a special visit from Santa Claus," said Lopez. "Entertainment included performances from Tahitian dancers, the 7th Fleet Band and MWR School-Age-Care children singing traditional Christmas carols."

Santa and Mrs. Claus are joined by children at his sleigh during the fifth annual CFAY tree lighting ceremony held at the red-brick area in front of the commissary Dec 1.

Although the night's weather wasn't very cooperative, according to Lopez, a combined total of approximately 500 enthusiastic people attended the tree lighting ceremonies.

"This year's tree lighting ceremony is great because there are a lot of children involved and it looks like they are enjoying it," said Jesseca Diokno, who has been attending the base's tree lighting ceremonies since 1992. "This one is special because my daughter is one of the Tahitian dancers performing at the event."

After a few children joined Santa and Mrs. Claus on their sleigh, the crowd began a countdown and the children helped Santa push the button to light up the holiday tree.

The moment the tree lit up, the crowd all cheered in unison.

"This ceremony is a great opportunity to better foster fellowship amongst the residents in the community during the holiday season," Lopez added. "It's important to feel a sense of community involvement especially at an overseas forward-deployed base so far from everyone's hometown and, or family."

For more information on upcoming MWR events, visit their website at http://mwryokosuka.wordpress.com.

Local bands come together to start holiday season with music

Story and photo by Joe Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

The 7th Fleet Band and the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) Band gave a joint performance of traditional and modern holiday music at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Fleet Theater on the evening of Dec. 3.

The theater was packed with both American and Japanese patrons.

"Our concept for this year was to give a full production," said Lt. j.g. Geordie Kelly, 7th Fleet Band Master. "I wanted lights, visuals, skits, vocals, different types of music and make it a full production."

Lt. j.g. Geordie Kelly, 7th Fleet Band Master, conducts an ensemble made up of members from the 7th Fleet Band and from the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force Band during a Holiday Concert in Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Fleet Theater Dec. 3. The annual event fills the theater with guests from the U.S. and Japanese communities.

Kelly took turns conducting the group of musicians from both bands with his JMSDF band master counterpart.

"They are wonderful to work with, they are fantastic musicians but also when you augment with that many musicians you get a nice full ensemble concert band with double reeds and different instruments that we don't typically have," said Kelly. "Also it visually represents the partner nations working together musically and militarily."

The bands played through holiday favorites like "Jingle Bells," "Silent Night," and the theme from the movie "Home Alone". The crowd sang and clapped along when they heard the songs they recognized.

"I loved it. I was crazy for it," said Casey Evans, who is a spouse of a USS George Washington Sailor and was in the crowd. "Being far away from home and family and celebrating the season with a few hundred other people and seeing the talent of the singers and the band, it was great."

Some of the attendants came from the local community but others had traveled from different parts of Japan to make it to the concert.

"It was a great performance," said Tomoko Mizuguchi, who traveled from Yokohama to see the show. "I was really impressed with the 7th Fleet Band and JMSDF joint performance. Both bands seem to me like they're helping each other. I think the performance symbolizes the friendship between the U.S. and Japan."

The bands' members also enjoyed their time playing the music and hearing the reaction from the crowd.

"It was extremely fun, it was a real joy to join the 7th Fleet Band tonight," said Petty Officer 3rd Class Nagisa Murakami through a translator. She has played with the JMSDF band for nine years. "My favorite parts were the song "Sleigh Bells" and the song at the end where everyone sang with us. It was really exciting."

Musician 3rd Class Michael Bookman Jr. played the trumpet solo portion of the song "Silent Night," which drew applause from the crowd. "I think music is an international language," explained Bookman. "We're one of the biggest assets to our military. Music changes moods; music changes ideas; music changes opinions of people because everyone understands music."

For those who missed the concert, the 7th Fleet Band will play another concert on Dec. 10 with the Yokosuka Fireman Band.

INSIDE

Yokosuka base library: Wealth of knowledge at your fingertips

Located in the Community Readiness, onboard CFAY, the Base Library offers a wealth of entertainment and knowledge for all age groups.

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KHS Drama Club performs Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit"

Nile C. Kinnick High School Drama Club onboard Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) performed a production of Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit" in the school's Little Theater Dec. 1-3.

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