Helping Hands brings message of thanks

By Jeffrey C. Doepp, CFAY Public Affairs

The Helping Hands organization held a gift presentation at the headquarters of Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Feb. 24 for Sailors who were assigned to the Commander 7th Fleet area of responsibility and took part in relief efforts.

Dubbed "Operation Tomodachi" by U.S. and Japanese forces, approximately 20,000 U.S. military personnel worked tirelessly alongside Japan Self-Defense Forces (JMSDF) following the magnitude 9.0 earthquake that erupted off the northeastern coast of Japan's main island of Honshu March 11, 2011, and the devastating tsunami, which followed and killed thousands of people.

The joint forces provided support that ranged from transporting JMSDF troops, equipment and supplies to clearing debris and delivering humanitarian aid

Helping Hands is a local Japanese organization that includes many volunteers from Yokosuka base, who, since April of last year, have worked to provide and facilitate aid to families in northern Honshu affected by those events of March 11.

Thank you gifts of hand-made *hina* dolls made by a Helping Hands member and origami cranes made by earthquake and tsunami survivors from Fukushima were collected and presented by Japanese children of Helping Hands volunteers to U.S. Navy representatives of those Sailors involved in Operation Tomodachi.

"I kept thinking of how we could create a way for these individuals of Japan to show their appreciation to the U.S. Navy in Yokosuka," said Helping Hands Organization representative Masako Sullivan, who was part of the start up of the organization and coordinated the gift presentation. "Then the idea came up – ask each person or family to make one origami crane and write their name, the city they are from and a thank you message on it."

Command Master Chiefs Paul Kingsbury of CNFJ, Tyler Schoeppey of C7F and Joseph Fahrney of CTF70 pose with children of Helping Hands organization volunteers during a gift presentation held at the CFAY headquarters conference room Feb. 24. The gifts of hand-made hina dolls made by a Helping Hands volunteer and the more than 2,400 origami cranes made by earthquake and tsunami survivors from Fukushima are gifts of thanks to those Sailors who were assigned to the C7F area of responsibility and took part in Operation Tomodachi.

According to Sullivan, it is the hope of Helping Hands and the Japanese people who made these cranes that, after the presentation, they would be displayed on the U.S. Navy ships for all the Sailors to see and read the messages of thanks.

"We collected more than 2,400 cranes from more than 650 people prior to our cut-off date. But, as more people found out about the opportunity more people wanted to contribute," Sullivan said. "I'm sure by now; we even have enough cranes for ships in San Diego and Sasebo. Many people wanted to make more than one crane!"

On hand to accept the gifts of thanks on behave of Sailors were command master chiefs Joseph Fahrney of Commander Task Force 70, Tyler Schoeppey of Commander 7th Fleet and Paul Kingsbury of Commander U.S. Naval Forces Japan.

"This is a great honor for us," said Fahrney. "Operation Tomodachi obviously started right after the great East earthquake and it was felt not only throughout our host nation here, but throughout the 7th Fleet, and really anywhere in the Pacific. You could not have been a Sailor, soldier, airman and Marine and not been impacted by what was seen on TV, what we were seeing in live feeds and live reports and what our Sailors, soldiers, airmen and Marines were out there doing. It was certainly a tragedy.

"It is very humbling to stand before you today and accept these gifts on behave of all of those Sailors, soldiers, airmen and Marines, but particularly those folks here in the U.S. Navy that provided support to the commander for 7th Fleet, the commander for Naval Forces Japan and Commander Task Force 70 to do the work we were able to do in some small part to help repair the tragedy that occurred up there. To the families that worked so very hard and the ladies (from Helping Hands) who put these gifts together, I thank you very much."

Theater group to perform for Women's History Month

By Jamie Chevalier, Seahawk contributor

March is Women's History Month, and the Yokosuka International Players (YIP) will be performing a play to honor the achievements of women in the military.

"The March Project" will be presented March 17 and 18 at the Nile C. Kinnick High School Theater.

The play tells the history of women in the military and includes scenes about the sacrifices of military spouses. Cindy Lopez, YIP president and writer and director of The March Project, said some members of the group discussed writing a play about military spouses, and the idea grew from that.

"I thought what if we did something for Women's History Month? We could really make it about women in the military and include spouses. It could be a March thing," Lopez said.

The main story is the history of women in the military, but Lopez said it is not limited to those who served.

"We use the word 'around' as well, because even women who served were not considered to be a part of (the military) for many years. It's also about the spouses and people who live the military life," she said.

According to Lopez, finding a lot of research on earlier women in the military was difficult.

"A lot of women served in earlier wars and didn't get recognition from Congress until the late '70s," she said.

She said the research she has done has been very educational for her and she wanted to share that and encourage people to educate themselves as well.

"Most people associate women in the military with nursing work, but women have served in all sorts of positions," Lopez said.

According to Lopez, this play is an opportunity to recognize women who have paved the way for this generation.

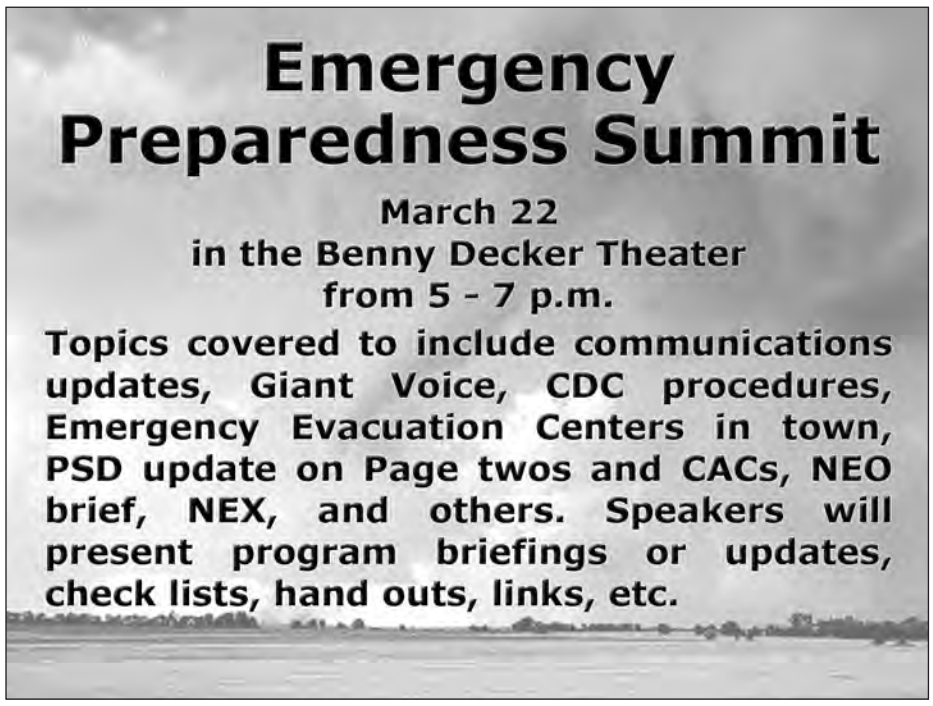
"It's about telling the whole history about America's history," she said. "There are a lot of unsung heroes who never made it into the official record."

Part of the proceeds from the production will be donated to charity, and part will be used for a scholarship for a student involved in performing arts. The rest will be used to cover expenses.

While they are unable to say specifically which charity the proceeds will benefit, Lopez said that it will be used to help homeless female veterans and their children.

"There are an appalling number of homeless veterans, but especially female veterans," she said. "A lot of the services available to veterans aren't available to children, like housing. So that leaves a lot of homeless mothers. It's tragic and appalling."

The March Project will be presented March 17 at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. and March 18 at 2 p.m.

Tickets will be sold at the door and the admission price is by donation only.

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