VITA program begins training, prepares volunteers for tax season

Story and photo by MC3 Bryan Reckard,
Navy Public Affairs Support Element, Japan

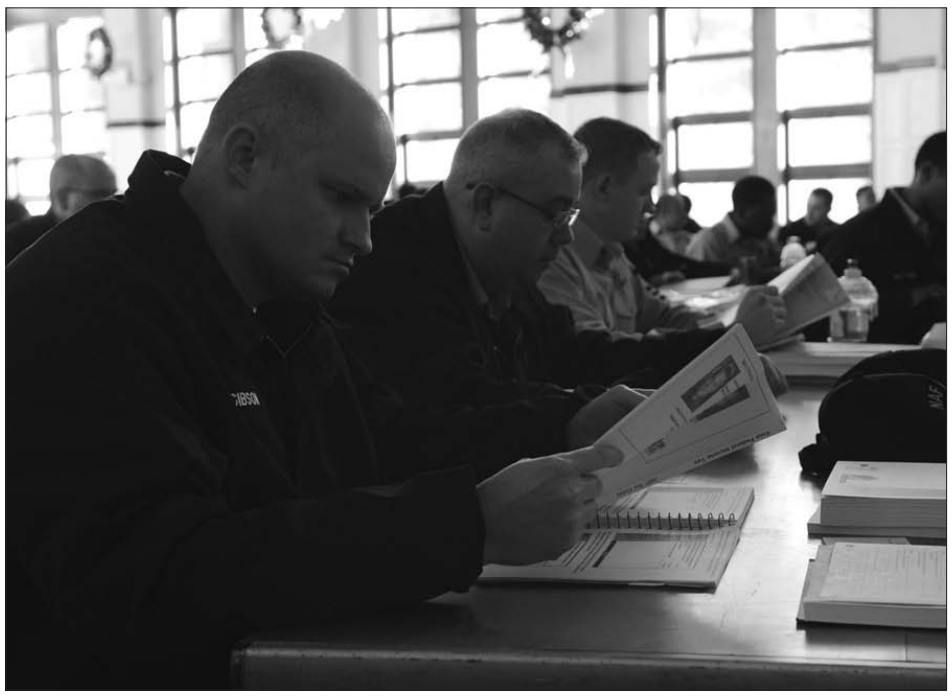
More than 50 Sailors, family members and civilians from Yokosuka participated in a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) class at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Jan. 13.

The VITA program is designed to give free income tax assistance on overseas military bases to military members, their families and Department of Defense civilians during the upcoming tax season. This training provides volunteers with the tools necessary to give accurate and effective tax service to the community.

According to Patrick Price, an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) tax consultant and instructor of the class, the course covers everything from figuring out someone's filing status to actually filing claims.

"We're giving them the training to be able to do returns that would cover basic issues - military specific issues," Price said. "Since we're living abroad, that also covers international issues."

Price, who instructed VITA volunteers in Europe last year, said that the IRS has an agreement with the Armed Forces Tax Counsel to go overseas and train volunteers to help people file their taxes because there are not always tax accountants available in overseas locations.



CS1(SW) Carey Gibson, a student in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program learns how to properly prepare taxes during training at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Jan. 13. Volunteers will provide free tax advice, preparation and assistance beginning in early February.

The class covers the material volunteers need in order to properly assist people in filing their tax returns. Having this volunteer-centric program is well received at overseas locations, evidenced by Sailors as far away as Naval Air Facility Atsugi attending the Yokosuka training session.

Lt. j.g. Jesse Adams from Hollywood, Fla., a defense and legal assistance attorney at Naval Legal Service Office Pacific and the program administrator for Yokosuka's VITA program was impressed by the turnout of potential volunteers.

"Several commands have sent over many volunteers - most notably the [USS] George Washington (CVN 73) has really kicked in and sent over more than 15 volunteers," Adams said. "Other commands such as the Naval Hospital, USS Blue Ridge (LCC 19), USS Fitzgerald (DDG 62) and FISC (Fleet and Industrial Supply Center). There's just a myriad of volunteers from various commands."

Culinary Specialist 1st Class (SW) Carey Gibson, a native of Virginia Beach, Va., was one of the volunteers who traveled from Atsugi, Japan to take part in the class and said that he has used base tax service offices for years. Past good experiences led to his interest in becoming a volunteer and hopefully pass the same positive takeaways to his shipmates.

With tax season just around the corner, Adams said his team of Yokosuka volunteers will be trained and ready to serve the community Feb. 3 and will remain open until late-June.

Drive safe: Yokosuka Taxi Voucher program proves successful

By MC2 Byron C. Linder,
Navy Public Affairs Support Element, Japan

Sailors, family members and Department of Defense civilians stationed at Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) took advantage of a new taxi voucher program - a free taxi ride home from base clubs -offered Dec. 15 to Jan. 5.

The program's goal, said CFAY's Drug and Alcohol Program Advisor (DAPA), Chief Culinary Specialist (SW) Randall Clift, was to first and foremost provide Sailors with a safe way to get home.

"The main focus was to make sure everyone got home safe from the base clubs to either their home of residence here on base or to the train station if they lived off-base. No questions were asked, no command name, no disciplinary action at all," he said. "The bottom line is to offer another option and take care of all our Sailors."

The program came to fruition through a brainstorming session with other DAPA's from around the base to prevent DUI infractions during the holiday season. In addition to strict DUI enforcement on base, stringent Japanese DUI laws applicable to service members and families under the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) punish offenders with jail time and thousands of dollars in fines.

The program's holiday season implementation, said Clift, targeted a time when DUI incidents typically increase.

"It's the holidays, you have people away from home that aren't used to it, and it's a relaxed work atmosphere," he said. "This was put out to all the chief's messes and all the DAPA's knew about it and I'm sure it was put out at quarters."

The voucher program was paid for through donations from Personnel Support Detachment Yokosuka, the CFAY Chief Petty Officer (CPO) Mess, the *USS Blue Ridge* and 7th Fleet joint CPO mess and the Far East CPO mess. The Navy Exchange donated advertisement posters that were posted at all base clubs and the Exchange New Car Sales office offered $200 in donations.

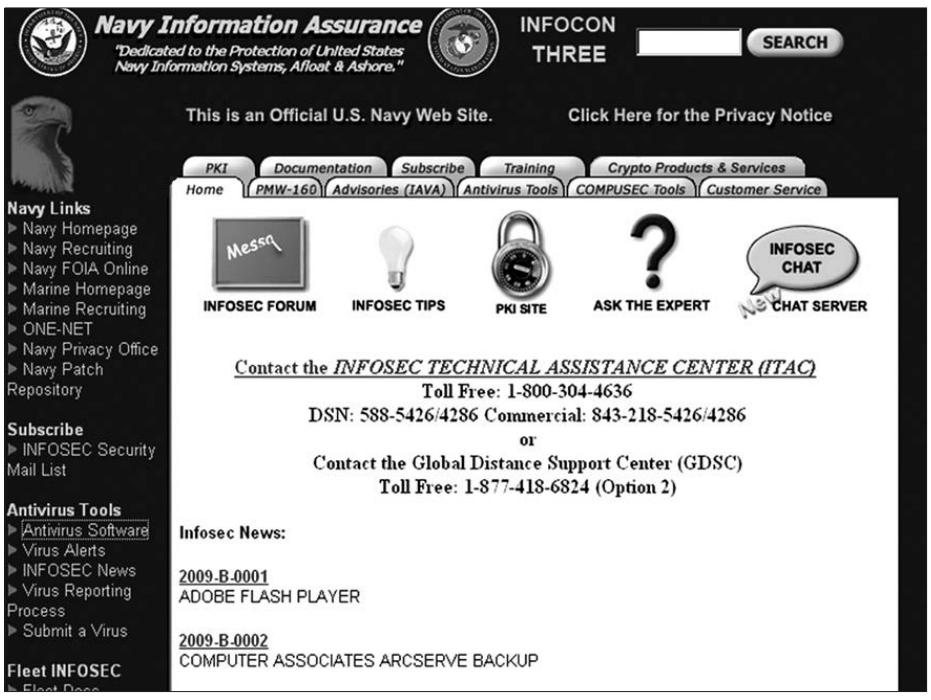
Clift credits a 58 percent drop in DUI infractions for the 2008-2009 holiday season to programs like the vouchers and the base's None For The Road and Clear Vision campaigns.

"The great thing about Yokosuka is that the majority of the people who choose to drink don't drive," he said. "We're not worried about the 90 percent of the people who don't drink and drive, it's the 10 percent we want to help. It's all about prevention."

Free anti-virus software available to military, civilain DoD members

By MC2(SW) Christopher Koons,
Naval Network Warfare Command Public Affairs

As cyberspace has become an increasingly active battlefield for the United States military, the need for effective anti-virus programs has grown.



To obtain anti-virus software, visit the Navy Information Assurance (INFOSEC) Web site at https://www.infosec.navy.mil. Go to the anti-virus tools section located on the left side of the page and click on the anti-virus software link.
Image courtesy of Navy Information Assurance Web site

Anti-virus software is found on every Department of Defense (DoD) computer to fight against common threats that often spread via e-mail and the Internet. DoD employees are vulnerable at work, and because many people bring work home, their home computers require protection to ensure that malicious files are not inadvertently transferred from an unprotected home system. To that end, several government Web sites offer free anti-virus software intended for use on service members' home computers.

The software is licensed for DoD employees, both military and civilian, courtesy of the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA). According to Information Systems Technician 1st Class (SW/AW) Angela Moffett, leading petty officer for Navy Cyber Defense Operations Command's (NCDOC) infrastructure department, recent cyber attacks have highlighted the importance of having this software available to DoD members.

"Because of the security challenges the Navy is currently experiencing and the growth in interconnected computer systems, the threats to information technology have become more sophisticated and diverse," said Moffett. "Anti-virus software is a tool we use in order to combat system vulnerability to malicious attacks."

To obtain anti-virus software, visit the Navy Information Assurance (INFOSEC) Web site at https://www.infosec.navy.mil. Go to the anti-virus tools section located on the left side of the page and click on the anti-virus software link.

"The INFOSEC Web site has a large variety of tools to gain knowledge on how to use anti-virus software and offers advice on how to deal with virus risks," said Moffett. "It also has descriptions of policies on how to protect DoD equipment and information. The other branches of the armed forces also have sites that offer these resources."

Members can either download via file transfer protocol (fast connection) or go to the INFOSEC FAQ page for slower downloads, then choose the software. Anti-virus software from McAfee is available, in addition to Symantec and TrendMicro, plus regular signature updates to keep PC workstations current.

Mac users can download McAfee Virex software and signatures for OS X, as well as earlier Mac operating systems. The sites even offer VirusScan for UNIX and DOS users.

"You should keep the software in a secure place such as your external hard drive or your local drive," said Moffett.