Seminar teaches shop owners how to cater to foreign residents

Story and photo by Dan Bowen, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Cultural Exchange Center hosted a Foreign Customer Service Seminar Aug. 31 sponsored by the Yokosuka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (YCCI) in an effort to help local shop owners better understand how to cater to foreign residents.

"When we talked to [the owners and staff of] Yokosuka stores, we learned that they had difficulty attracting foreign customers. They had never had the opportunity to learn about the language issue and the cultural differences they have with foreign customers," said Kimie Ota from the Yokosuka Chamber of Commerce Information and Planning Division, who conducted the seminar. "Moreover, they didn't know what [foreign customers] want and how they want to be treated. This seminar enables local Yokosuka restaurant and store owners to ask questions to Sailors in order to understand them better. Throughout the seminar, we hope that the local Japanese participants will gain confidence in providing services to foreign customers in Japanese, even if they cannot speak English."

More than 20 shop owners attended the seminar to hear the views of four Sailors who are stationed on board CFAY. The seminar began with the Sailors introducing themselves and then answering a variety of questions from the shop owners in regards to their reactions to eating at restaurants out in town, interacting with Japanese staff and other customer service oriented issues.

The majority of the issues brought up were things that shop owners had heard before, such as providing English menus and using familiar English phrases in the store, the important aspect of the seminar was both sides enthusiastically demonstrating a willingness to come together, learn about each other and continue to improve on an already solid relationship.

Kimie Ota of the Yokosuka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (YCCI) conducts a role play with two Sailors during the Foreign Customer Service Seminar at the Cultural Exchange Center Aug. 31. The seminar was sponsored by the YCCI in an effort to help local shop owners better understand how to cater to foreign residents.

"I enjoy doing volunteer work, especially with the Japanese, because it gives us an opportunity to interact with them and it lets them know that Americans support the Japanese," said Interior Communications Electrician 2nd Class Kevin Penson, one of the Sailors who volunteered to take part in the seminar.

The seminar follows up years of work by the YCCI to help facilitate smoother and more satisfying experiences between base residents and local business owners. In 2008, they developed the "base-friendly establishment sticker" and the Sukaichi website. The stickers are received by establishments who have become members of the website www.sukaichi-e.com (Sukaichi), a site aimed at helping the foreign residents in the area get information in English about many of the restaurants, stores, hotels and other places of interest in Yokosuka.

"Hopefully, today's participants will gain some confidence in being able to serve foreign customers and will register for the Yokosuka Ichiban site," said Ota. "I hope everyone will come out to the local Yokosuka stores and check them out."

Penson hopes everyone takes Ota's advice, because according to him, you can't be afraid to venture outside the gates if you're going to truly benefit from being stationed in Japan.

"Get out there and take advantage of the opportunities," said Penson. "A lot of people get complacent and they say 'there's nothing to do out here' or 'I don't understand,' and that's their own fault. You have to get out there and just go after it. That's what [being stationed in] Japan is all about – diving into the culture."

FFSC provides training to Sailors assigned as command sponsors

By Bruce Moody, CNIC Navy Family Readiness Program

The Command Sponsor Program is the subject of the latest FAMILYGRAM of Vice Chief of Naval Operations (VCNO) Adm. Jonathan W. Greenert. Commander Navy Installations Command (CNIC) provides valuable training to Sailors assigned as command sponsors through Fleet and Family Support Centers (FFSC). Sailors who serve as sponsors are trained to ease the transition of Sailors and their families into new working and living environments.

"A smooth transition provides Sailors and families the greatest opportunity for a successful and productive tour of duty," Greenert wrote in the FAMILYGRAM. "The command sponsor program is one of the most important quality of life programs for Sailors and families who are relocating under permanent change of station (PCS) orders."

Sponsorship training is available to Sailors E-5 and above and officers. Training is offered at the local Fleet and Family Support Center. Attendees are provided materials which walks them through their likely experience as a sponsor. To-do checklists and timelines are provided, one for Sailors with families and one for Sailors without. Sponsors are also provided examples of e-mails to send to inbound Sailors.

Those are the basics, and they are good to know, but the larger benefit to the training is learning about the local resources and programs, according to CNIC Fleet and Family Support Program Relocation Program Manager Dede O'Rourke.

"It's a good idea to attend sponsor training, even if you've attended at another command," O'Rourke said. "Every FFSC is different, but they generally try to bring in local contacts from organizations, such as Morale, Welfare and Recreation or the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society."

According to O'Rourke, attending training at a center also gives sponsors a chance to see and learn more about what their local FFSC has to offer Sailors and families.

Commands who want to have several Sailors attend training at one time can request that their local FFSC conduct training on board the command.

More information about the Command Sponsorship Program is in Greenert's latest FAMILYGRAM located at http://www.npc.navy.mil/NR/rdonlyres/94F08E79-E498-43E9-9089-B3CEBEEF27D4/0/NAV10289.txt.

Military and overseas voters, submit your ballot request for the general election now

By Federal Voting Assistance Program Public Affairs

There are only seven weeks until the Nov. 2 general election. If you have not already requested your absentee ballot, do so immediately. It's simple and it's fast. Go to www.FVAP.gov and use the online registration and absentee ballot assistant to have your forms completed, printed out, and ready to send back home in less than 10 minutes.

States begin mailing ballots Sept. 18 (45 days before the general election), however, due to mail delays, you may not get your ballot in time to vote, return it and have it counted. So don't delay and submit your absentee ballot application today.

As of Sept. 1, the Military Postal Service Agency began providing free expedited ballot delivery and ballot tracking information to your local election office for military and their family members stationed overseas. Go to your local post office or postal clerk and use the Label 11 - DoD on your absentee ballot and mail it. You will then be able to track the status of your ballot on the U.S. Postal Service website at www.usps.com.

If you do not receive your ballot by Oct. 2, use the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot (FWAB) as your back-up ballot. Go to www.FVAP.gov and use the automated assistant to complete the FWAB. For each office for which you vote, write in either a candidate's name or their party designation; check your state election website for candidate information, which generally is available 45 days before the election. If you receive your state ballot after submitting the FWAB, vote and return the state ballot as well. The state will only count your FWAB if your state ballot is not received by the deadline.

You may register and request an absentee ballot using the Federal Post Card Application form. This form is accepted by all states and territories and is postage paid in the U.S. mail, including the Military Postal System. Hard copies of the form can be obtained from a U.S. embassy or consulate or requested directly from the FVAP website www.fvap.gov or by calling 00531-1208-96 toll free in Japan.

An online version of the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form is also available. The online version must be completed, printed, signed, dated and mailed directly to your local election official in an envelope with proper postage, or mailed using our prepaid return envelope.

Contact the Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka installation voting assistance officer at 243-3372 or visit the website www.fvap.gov for more information.