Volunteers deliver smiles, gifts to Tokyo children's home

Story and photos by Blake Vives, CFAY Public Affairs

A group of Yokosuka Base volunteers from various commands and organizations brought holiday cheer in the form of new clothes, shoes and toys donated through the Toys for Tots program to the less-fortunate children of the St. Joseph Children's Home in Tokyo Dec. 5.

"I would like to send a big thank you to the people who donated the toys that we delivered," said U.S. Fleet and Industrial Supply Center (FISC) Yokosuka employee and gift delivery volunteer Logistics Specialist 2nd Class Marygrace Cerrillo. "By giving that toy to Toys for Tots you put a smile on a child's face. It might seem like something little [to give a toy]; but, for the kids receiving them, it's a special gift that they will treasure."

This exciting and rewarding annual event is anticipated by volunteers and children alike.

"Volunteering to deliver toys and clothes to the St. Joseph Children's Home was important to me for two reasons," said FISC Yokosuka employee Ship's Serviceman 1st Class (SW) Brian Graebner. "It was a chance for me to show my children what it feels like to give to those who do not have. Second, it has been something I have wanted to be part of since I have been at FISC but have never had the chance to do."

The jolly laughter of St. Nick brightened the faces of the more than 60 young residents of the St. Joseph Children's Home as the gifts arrived.

"It was a great time, especially seeing the children's smiles and excitement when they started to open their gifts," said Defense Distribution Yokosuka Japan employee Lt. Juan Espiritusanto. "I wanted to be a part of the gift delivery to the children because my life is a blessing every day and I believe that if I want the blessings to continue I need to share them with other people, especially the less fortunate."

Each child at the St. Joseph Children's Home in Tokyo took a turn sitting on Santa's lap and receiving their Christmas presents Dec. 5. After Santa's gifts were given out, Marines from the Semper Fi Society made their first delivery of toys donated by the Yokosuka Base community through the Toys for Tots program.

To prepare for the event the volunteers collected clothes donations tailored to each child's needs and coordinated delivery of toys from Toys for Tots with the Marines of the Semper Fi Society.

"The joy that we gave these children, even if that joy was for one day, was so fulfilling," said FISC Yokosuka employee Staff Sgt. Ginger Lipscomb. "When I saw the children, I realized how lucky I am to be able to give my own children all that I can.

FISC employees LS2 Maria Merto, LS2 Marygrace Cerrillo, and Yokosuka Co-op Preschool employee Alicia Graebner prepare for a Christmas party for the children of the St. Joseph Children's Home in Tokyo by arranging the many donated gifts under the Christmas tree in the children's common room Dec. 5.

"It was also important for me go to the toy delivery because we are ambassadors for not only the U.S. military but for the American people as well. I hope that this inspires other people to get out there, to volunteer in the community and show them that Americans are caring people."

The children took turns visiting with Santa Claus and receiving their gifts.

Following Santa's gift giving, the children received the toys collected by the Marines of the Semper Fi Society that were donated by the Yokosuka Base community.

"I wanted to have the experience of going to a children's home to see how a toy or new clothing can bring happiness to the children's faces," said FISC Yokosuka employee and Semper Fi Society Vice President Gunnery Sgt. Javier Andino. "Children need to be shown love and these gifts do that, especially during Christmas. It was a great experience that put a tear in my eye because I know there are a lot of needy children out there and the children in these homes don't have father or mother figures; they just have the other children and the people who work at the homes. By going there and showing that we care, with the toys and clothes and interactively playing with them, they feel loved."

The St. Joseph Children's Home is one of the many facilities for less-fortunate children throughout Japan that receive visits from the sharply dressed Marines.

The children performed Christmas songs in Japanese to express their gratitude for the Christmas party. Afterward, the children and volunteers played games and renewed the friendships they formed during previous visits.

Originally established in 1946 to support children orphaned during World War II, today, the mission of the St. Joseph Children's Home, according to official translated literature, is to provide shelter to children ages two to 18 who need a supportive environment. They are raised based on the principals of self-reliance, emotional stability and being valuable Japanese citizens.

The toys delivered to the St. Joseph Children's Home comprised the first delivery of the season through the Toys for Tots charity. Many more deliveries are planned for orphanages and children's hospitals in the local area. The Marines also plan to ship toys to orphanages in other countries in the 7th Fleet area of operations.

The mission of Toys for Tots, according to the Web site www.toysfortots.org, is "to collect new, unwrapped toys during October, November and December each year, and distribute those toys as Christmas gifts to needy children in the community in which the campaign is conducted."

Usually coordinated by Marine reserve units in the United States, the Yokosuka Semper Fi Society assumes the responsibility of organizing the Toys for Tots program in Yokosuka because no reserve units are present.

The Yokosuka Semper Fi Society is a private organization of six Marines working to gain leadership experience, better the local community and provide toys to less-fortunate children through Toys for Tots.

Post Office Holiday Hours

Package pick-up hours are
extended:
Dec. 24 until 8 p.m.

Customer service counters will be
closed :
Dec. 25-27 and Jan. 1-3

Mail will continue to be sorted into boxes during "closed" hours.

Happy Holidays from FISC Military Post Offices

Happy holidays from FISC

The FISC Yokosuka holiday party was preceded with plenty of cheer as FISC Yokosuka Commanding Officer Capt. Mike Arnold gave many U.S. military, U.S. civil service and Master Labor Contract employees awards, service pins, medals and recognized them for their dedication to duty and hard work throughout the year Dec. 4.

Photo by Blake Vives