Sullivans students support service members in Iraq, Afghanistan

By Dan Bowen, CFAY Public Affairs

Sailors, Marines and Soldiers serving in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom are in for a cheerier holiday season thanks to the thoughtfulness of a group of The Sullivans Elementary School students in Randi Dalton's 3rd-grade class.

The class sent care packages to troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan to show their support for service members serving in harm's way. "Our students understand what it means to have a family member deployed and how a card, letter or small gift can really brighten someone's day" said Dalton. "As children of military members, they have a unique perspective." A project like this allows them to understand that even eight-year olds can make a difference."

The students included presents and items that were requested on the Web site www.anysoldier.com, a site dedicated to distributing care packages to service members serving on the front lines. They also sent items that the students thought service members might like including handmade Christmas and Hanukkah cards, snack foods, warm socks, holiday decorations as well as dog treats and dog toys for the troops who have military working dogs - students also brought school supplies, candy and small stuffed toys for the soldiers to distribute to local children.

The Sullivans Elementary School students Andria Dalton, Nash Euman and Ryan Hawkins from Randi Dalton's 3rd-grade class, prepare a care package to send to service members serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Photo by Patrice Noma

As children of forward-deployed service members, the students know what it means to be separated from family and how much a package from home can mean to someone serving overseas. "My Dad is on the [USS] *Fitzgerald* [DDG 62] and I know he's sad whenever he is away from us," said Amanda Fuentes, one of Dalton's students. "We send him cards and snacks sometimes to make him feel good. Sending cards and snacks to the Sailors and Soldiers can help them feel good too, which makes me happy."

Dalton has worked with students in her classes to make cards, write letters and prepare care packages for Soldiers and Sailors who are deployed in dangerous locations overseas since 2004.

According to the Web site www.anysoldier.com, Sgt. Brian Horn from LaPlata, Maryland, an Army infantry soldier with the 173rd Airborne Brigade, was in the Kirkuk area of Iraq when he started the idea of "Any Soldier" to help care for his soldiers. He agreed to distribute packages that would come to him with "Attn: Any Soldier" in the address to soldiers who didn't get mail. Horn later completed a tour in Afghanistan and is now home.

Although the Any Soldier program was initially created to provide soldiers in one unit with care packages and supplies, in 2004, due to an overwhelming number of requests, the program was expanded to include any service member serving in a dangerous area overseas.

Yokosuka Sailors spread cheer during annual holiday dance party

By Fumiyo Sato, CFAY Public Affairs

Nearly 100 Sailors came together to participate in the annual Christmas Disco Party for the disabled at the Yokosuka Sogo Fukushi Kaikan Hall Dec. 2.

The annual event started 14 years ago and is sponsored by the Yokosuka Lion's Club for the mentally disabled who work at *Sagyosho* or other regional workshops. A number of nonprofit organizations run workshops in Yokosuka to help the locally disabled gain work and social experience.

"They look forward to coming to this party every year," said Akira Mogi, director of the workshop Himawari. "They don't have an opportunity to get physically active in their daily life, although they want to. Since we started the disco party, they have become more cheerful."

This year, the large number of Sailors who volunteered to support the party was almost twice as many as last year. "Thanks for the Sailors. We had many volunteers and we were able to have a big party this year," said Lions Club member Hirokatsu Saito. "I am so glad that they came here to help us out. I hope they'll continue cooperating for the U.S.-Japan friendship."

Approximately 145 Japanese people attended the party, which included 85 local disabled people along with 35 assistants and 25 Lions Club members.

"They really enjoy dancing with the Sailors – [the Sailors] were really kind and helped encouraged them to dance," said Mogi. "It is special for them to dance with Sailors because they don't have the opportunity to meet Americans in town."

The party was also a special moment for Sailors to meet local residents and have fun together. "I had a blast," said Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Brittany Robinson of *USS McCambell* (DDG 85). "I made two new friends. We passed out [ship] stickers and danced."

Instead of Japanese and American pop music that was played last year, this year's party was filled with American-style disco music. One of the volunteers acted as a disc jockey and both Sailors and Japanese participants danced along to songs including "Celebration" by Kool and the Gang, "Ring my bell" by Anita Ward and "Beat it" by Michael Jackson.

"I would definitely encourage everybody to come out, said Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Lavonne Melton of U.S. Naval Hospital Yokosuka. "This is a great opportunity to get involved in the community and to meet different people."

Sailors from throughout CFAY dance at the Christmas Disco Party for the disabled during a community relations project at the Sogo Fukushi Hall Dec. 2. Nearly 100 Sailors volunteered to participate in the event, almost twice as many as last year.

Photo by Yuji Kawabe

After taking a break from dancing, a magic show entertained both Japanese and American participants. After the second phase started, Sailors and Japanese participants kept dancing together, sharing laughter and joy until the end.

"All the Sailors and the Japanese people told me that they had a great time," said Senior Chief Navy Counselor Johannes Gonzalez after the party. "It is important for us to share these types of moments with our neighbors. It is important for them to see that we appreciate their support, their community and that we enjoy sharing good times with them."