

Trees are blessed before being cut down

Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Vivian Blakely

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BLESSINGS

NAVAL AIR FACILITY ATSUGI, Japan – For two massive trees along the cart path of the Naval Air Facility (NAF) Atsugi golf course, the time has come to be cut down in the name of safety and progress. But they will not be removed from the course without their due respect. The trees will receive a traditional Japanese Tree Blessing before their removal.

“The Tree Blessing is very important,” said Project Engineer Chikako Ozawa. “Many Japanese believe that there are spirits in the trees. When a big tree like this one has lived for one or two centuries, it is considered nearly a god. So we want to respect the tree before cutting it.”

The Tree Blessing was conducted by a priest of the Zama Shinto shrine and held at the site of the two trees. Employees of the golf

course as well as the construction contractors all attended the outdoor ceremony to pay their respects to the tradition.

The two trees are being removed from the course in order to make way for the expansion of the golf net which separates the fairway from the neighboring Japanese community.

“The big thing is all about safety,” said Ron Nichols, general manager and Golf Pro of the installation’s golf course. “We’re putting the nets in higher so we don’t have anymore balls flying out of the golf course and landing anywhere near our Japanese neighbors.”

Not only is the golf course losing two trees to increase safety standards, but they also lost 87 trees to the recent typhoon.

With the loss of so many trees the golf course plans to install several hundred trees to spruce up the course grounds.

“At this particular moment in time, we are getting ready to put in a tree plantation,” said Nichols. “We’re going to replace and put about 4 to 5 hundred trees on the golf course. So not only would we be replacing the ones that were taken out, but we’re putting in several hundred to populate the golf course.”

After uttering the last few prayers, the priest invited the attendees to participate in the blessing by laying down Tamagushi (sprig leaf) and Shide (zigzag paper) on the altar.

As is tradition with many Japanese ceremonies, the priest closed the observance by passing around small cups of sake for everyone to sip from.

The sake was offered to the gods in order to secure good fortune for the contractors and their endeavors.

“I think it improves the course for the safety standard, but really it’s the relations with our Japanese neighbors,” said Nichols, reflecting upon the removal of the trees. “We want to make sure that our Japanese neighbors know that we are going to do everything possible to make sure their safety is our number one priority.”