Fleet Activities, Yokosuka, Japan

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Sailors welcome families back after voluntary departure ends

Story and photo by Joe Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

YOKOSUKA, Japan - Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) started a program April 21 for volunteers from the community to meet families returning to Japan at Narita International Airport. The returning families had participated in the Voluntary Military Assisted Departure (VMAD) that started March 16.

"They were requesting volunteers so I volunteered for one of the days to come and do it," said Master-at-Arms 1st Class (SW) Adrian DeJesus, who was in charge of the airport volunteers for April 25.

Narita International Airport is about 85 miles from where most of the families live in Japan and requires either a two-hour ride in a vehicle or a three-hour ride on a train to get the travelers back to their homes.

DeJesus didn't personally know any of the travelers who were returning, he volunteered his time just to help out. "After the situation, they'll feel more comfortable when the first face they see is us trying to help them out get back to base and their families," DeJesus said.

The family members, who had been staying with friends and relatives in the United States while waiting for the VMAD to be lifted, were returning from places like the state of Washington or California. Some members flew for 12 hours or more returning to Japan from the east coast.

Among the returning families was Sundee Hansen, spouse of a *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) Sailor, and her two boys. She departed Japan for about a month using the VMAD.

Sundee Hansen and her two children depart the Narita International Airport terminal with assistance from MA1(SW) Adrian DeJesus April 25. DeJesus was one of many CFAY Sailors who volunteered to meet and assist CFAY families returning to Japan after the Voluntary Military Assisted Departure was lifted.

"I think that it was very well organized and I think that CFAY did a really good job, like putting the word out on Facebook and [getting] the [plane] tickets was really fast," Hansen said. "I was very satisfied with it," said Hanson.

DeJesus and the other volunteers loaded the passenger's bags on to carts and moved the luggage out to the bus that would go back to CFAY. Before boarding, Hansen said she was relieved someone was there to help.

"It feels really good and we are excited to get back into the normal swing of life," she said. We haven't seen daddy for a month so we are really excited to see him and all of our friends. We stayed connected while we were gone but it's going to be really fun getting together with everybody."

The volunteers finished loading the bus and headed back inside the airport to get ready for the next group of travelers due in the next few hours. DeJesus' group would be relieved the next day when another team of volunteers would drive to the airport and help more families as they return back home to Yokosuka.

Families, friends gather, celebrate Month of the Military Child

Story and photo by MC2(SW/AW) John Smolinski, CFAY Public Affairs

YOKOSUKA, Japan - Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) Department helped the community celebrate Month of the Military Child with an Easter egg hunt and fair at the George I. Purdy Fitness Center April 23.

The event wrapped up April's Month of the Military Child, which recognizes military children and youth for their heroism, character, courage, sacrifices and continued resilience.

"Coincidently and appropriately, this event is occurring as many of the family members are returning," said Lee Leach, MWR teen and youth program coordinator. "The focus here is on the military child; however this has become an opportunity for families, friends and co-workers to get together and have fun."

As many of the ships that participated in Operation Tomodachi and their family members who participated in the Voluntary Military Assisted Departure (VMAD) return to CFAY, the Easter egg hunt and fair has been an opportunity for families to reunite.

"My family loves Easter," said Lt. Cmdr. Kevin Ralston, executive officer of *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19). "And it's our families that keep us going… since so many of us spend a lot of time away from home, it's important for us to do as much as we can together."

Since the Department of State lifted the VMAD April 14, many families have been returning to CFAY.

"This is a great community and family event," said Capt. Donna M. Kasper, CFAY chief staff officer. "It's great to have so many families returning and participating today."

Planning for the Month of the Military Child celebration started months ago before the earthquake and tsunami struck Japan March 11. Many ships and shore commands stationed here at CFAY contributed to making this event happen.

"With the help of volunteers from *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) and Naval Hospital Yokosuka, we have been able to transition this event inside seamlessly," said Leach. "This represents the culmination of what we have gone through as a community."

DC1 Nathan Gee assigned to the guided-missile cruiser *USS Shiloh* (CG 67) and his son, Chris, interact with a mascot at the Month of the Military Child celebration held at the George I. Purdy Fitness Center April 23.

A raining Saturday morning did not dampen the enthusiasm displayed by the families attending the event.

"The kids are having a great time," said Kasper. "With all the balloons, eggs, jump toys and games, everyone here has a smile on their face… even though the weather didn't cooperate with us today, the MWR folks and all the volunteers have done an excellent job making this happen indoors."

INSIDE

FAST Company Pacific holds change of command

Maj. Marc H. Foster relieved Maj. Thomas E. Elders during a change of command ceremony held on board *USS Blue Ridge* (LCC 19) April 27.

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Motorcycle courses help raise rider awareness

Cape Fox Professional Services Basic Rider Course was held at Yokohama North Dock April 25. The course is designed to teach basic motorcycle safety and riding skills.

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