Capt. David Fluker, commanding officer of the forward-deployed amphibious assault ship *USS Essex (LHD 2)* poses with members of the Sasebo Navy League council during an annual dinner and council meeting aboard *Essex*. *Essex* is the lead ship of the only forward-deployed amphibious ready group in the U.S. Navy.

USS Essex hosts year's first Navy League business meeting

Story by Adam M. Bennett,
***USS ESSEX (LHD 2)* Public Affairs**

SASEBO, Japan – Sasebo's Navy League held their first business meeting of 2012 during a dinner held onboard *USS Essex (LHD 2)* Jan. 17.

The Sasebo Navy League council acting president and 2012 Vice President James Whalen met with Capt. David Fluker, commanding officer of *USS Essex*, over dinner to discuss the relationship between the two organizations.

"The Sasebo Navy League council meets once a month but we come aboard Essex only once a year," said Whalen. "Essex is the largest ship here so a large portion of the Sailors we support are on board.

The commanding officer and the executive officer always open their door to us at short notice and welcome us in."

The Navy League has three missions: to enhance the morale of active duty personnel and their families; to inform Congress and the American public on the importance of strong sea services; and to support youth through programs such as the Naval Sea Cadet Corps, Junior ROTC and Young Marines that expose young people to the values of our sea services.

"The Navy League here in Sasebo will stand out in the cold and the rain to welcome back its Sailors from their deployments," said Whalen. "We volunteer our time and a substantial amount of money to recognize Sailors by giving them awards or throwing banquets.

The Navy League also has very strong ties in the community of Sasebo including very influential businessmen and women from the area."

Fluker welcomed the League aboard to have dinner in the ship's wardroom before their monthly meeting.

"It is always a privilege to hold this meeting aboard *Essex*," said Fluker. "The Sasebo Navy League is an integral part of the naval community and its efforts remain in stride with the Navy's core values and dedication to service are noteworthy.

Our relationship is not only important to the welfare of our Sailors and Marines but also mutually beneficial for both organizations."

According to Whalen, a former Marine, many of the council members are former Navy sea service members themselves and enjoyed the opportunity to come aboard, dine in and tour *Essex*.

"We had a great time," said Whalen. "The dinner was great and the Japanese members love to come here and see the ship."

Essex is part of the Essex Amphibious Ready Group and reports to Commander, Amphibious Force 7th Fleet Rear Adm. J. Scott Jones, who is headquartered in Okinawa, Japan.

USS Houston arrives at new homeport in Pearl Harbor

By Ronald Gutridge,
Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs

PEARL HARBOR (NNS) -- Los Angeles-class fast attack submarine *USS Houston (SSN 713)* arrived at its new homeport, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Jan. 17, after completing a change of homeport from Commander, Submarine Squadron 15 in Apra Harbor, Guam.

Houston, with a crew size of 150, departed Guam Jan. 6 after nine years of being forward deployed. While at Pearl Harbor, *Houston* will be assigned to Commander, Submarine Squadron 7.

"The crew is looking forward to living in a more diverse tropical paradise and enjoying everything Oahu has to offer," said Cmdr. David Schappert, *Houston* commanding officer. "And at the same time, being closer to family in the continental United States."

SUBIC BAY, Philippines (Feb. 26, 2010) A tug boat comes alongside the Los Angeles-class attack submarine *USS Houston (SSN 713)* as she arrives in Subic Bay, Philippines.

U.S. Navy file photo

While the crew was focused on preparing the submarine for the voyage across the Pacific, families transferred their children to their new schools and shipped household goods largely without the assistance from their Sailor. Personnel Support Detachments and housing offices in Guam and Hawaii provided assistance during this change.

"It was a lot of work leading up to this move and I am glad we are finally here," said Machinist's Mate 2nd Class (SS) Reynaldo Perez from San Antonio. "I am really looking forward to learning about the Hawaiian culture and experiencing all the great things Hawaii has to offer."

While transiting to Hawaii, the crew conducted a time-honored Navy tradition of "crossing the line." This was a unique ceremony where the submarine crossed the equator and the International Date Line at the same time allowing the crew to qualify as "golden shellbacks."

Houston is the fourth ship to be named after the Texas city and is capable of conducting anti-surface and anti-submarine operations along with guided missile strike operations using conventional Tomahawk land attack missiles.