Command master chief addresses Japanese spouse group

Story and photo by Joe Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Command Master Chief (CMC) Gregory A. Vidaurri spoke with Japanese spouses of military service members April 6, about how the base is responding to the effects of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami that struck northern Japan.

Rie Coyne works at the CFAY Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC) and volunteered to coordinate the event.

"At this time, after the voluntary departure had started, I ran into a lot of people who were confused and not knowing anything because everything was provided in English and their husbands were out to sea," said Coyne.

Many of the spouses speak English as a second language and didn't get all the same information that their native English speaking counterparts were receiving. FFSC teamed up with the Japanese Spouse Group to get the event for these spouses organized. Coyne translated the meeting so everyone understood what was being discussed.

"I was able to get the first group together to meet and we told them that they are not alone, we are in this together," said Coyne. "So, we then asked if the CMC could come and now we feel so much better."

After Coyne gave a few opening remarks she turned the event over to Vidaurri who started taking questions from the group.

"Communication is key in any event that ever happens," said Vidaurri. "And when you are communicating any type of message, any time you are able to stand up in front of people and address their concerns, that return investment is huge. I know these spouses are going to leave this event and go tell their friends. They aren't going to have to read it in an e-mail. They are not going to get it second hand. They are going to get it first hand right here today. That's why town hall meetings or discussion groups where we can have senior leadership on a base come and sit down with particular target groups really pays a lot of dividends for us."

Some of the topics covered in the meeting were information sources, medical care, infant and children concerns, rolling black out schedules, school schedules, passport applications and many others. Vidaurri stayed to answer all the questions the group had until there were no more raised hands.

"I really appreciate that the military is helping Japan," said Reina Bay, who helped with the event and asked a few of her own questions. "I feel safe living on base but after these things happened there were so many rumors and it was really confusing, but now I feel OK."

CFAY CMDCM(SW) Gregory A. Vidaurri speaks with Japanese spouses of service members April 6, about how the command is responding to the effects of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami. Many of the spouses speak English as a second language and Vidaurri wanted them to have the same access to information as their American counterparts. FFSC employee Rie Coyne translated the meeting so everyone understood what was being discussed.

Coyne said that as more news comes out in the future, she will try to plan more meetings for Japanese spouses to continue to get information from the base and the commands that operate there.

Near the end of the event, several of the spouses expressed a calmer, more positive outlook by saying 'kokoro sukkirishita' which means 'my heart feels much better.'

Yokosuka's NMCRS active duty fund drive continues through April

From CFAY Public Affairs

Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS) kicked off the 2011 active duty fund drive here at the Fleet Theater March 7 and continues through April.

NMCRS is a private, non-profit, volunteer and charitable organization that aims to provide financial, educational and other assistance to U.S. Navy and Marine Corps service members, their eligible family members and survivors who are in need.

The editor asks:

Did you know, the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society is the oldest of the four military aid organizations?

The Society relies on donations resulting from the Department of the Navy Active Duty Fund Drive and the Secretary of the Navy Direct Mail Campaign, both conducted each year during the months of March and April. This is truly the Navy and Marine Corps way of taking care of their own.

Despite an unstable economy, the 2010 Active Duty Fund Drive generated $10.3 million in donations and retired Sailors and Marines contributed an additional $2.4 million. Consider this: If every Sailor and Marine donated just $5 per month, the Society would have $64 million to respond to your needs!

The Society celebrates its 107th anniversary this year. The Society traces its roots to the 1903 football game between the U.S. Naval Academy Midshipmen and the Cadets from West Point. Although the score was one-sided (the Mids lost 40-5), the Navy and Marine Corps were also winners because President Theodore Roosevelt gave the Navy one-third of the gate receipts ($9,000), providing initial funding for our organization.

Since its founding in 1904, Society volunteers and employees have provided more than $1.1 billion in interest-free loans and grants to more than 4 million active duty and retired Sailors, Marines and their families.

Contact your local area coordinator or visit the website www.nmcrs.org for more information.

For more than 107 years, the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society has provided support and responded to emergency financial needs of active duty and retired Sailors, Marines and their families. And as the challenges facing our Sailors and Marines have grown increasingly complex, it is important to provide our support to the NMRCS by taking care of our own during the NMRCS fund drive.

"Last year we gave $474,451 in funds and, unfortunately, only brought in $287,000, said Amy Lacaria, NMCRS Yokosuka director. "If every Sailor and Marine stationed here in Yokosuka gave just $5 a month or $60 for the year, we would raise more than $1 million."

The main source of funds for NMCRS is from active duty and retiree solicitations, and according to Chief Warrant Officer Tina Broome, the 2011 NMCRS Yokosuka area fund drive coordinator, as of March 25, Yokosuka afloat and ashore units have reported more than $90,000 in donations.

This year, members of the organization were hoping that they fair a little better, but understand it might not be possible with the current crisis in Japan.

"Our overall goal for the drive this year is to make 100 percent contact, and of course to meet or exceed last year's contribution," said Broome. "But, due to the earthquake disaster, we were unable to meet our goal… on our set deadline of March 31. However, we're still shooting for it and we have until April 30."

Broome, like other volunteers are what keep the NMCRS going.

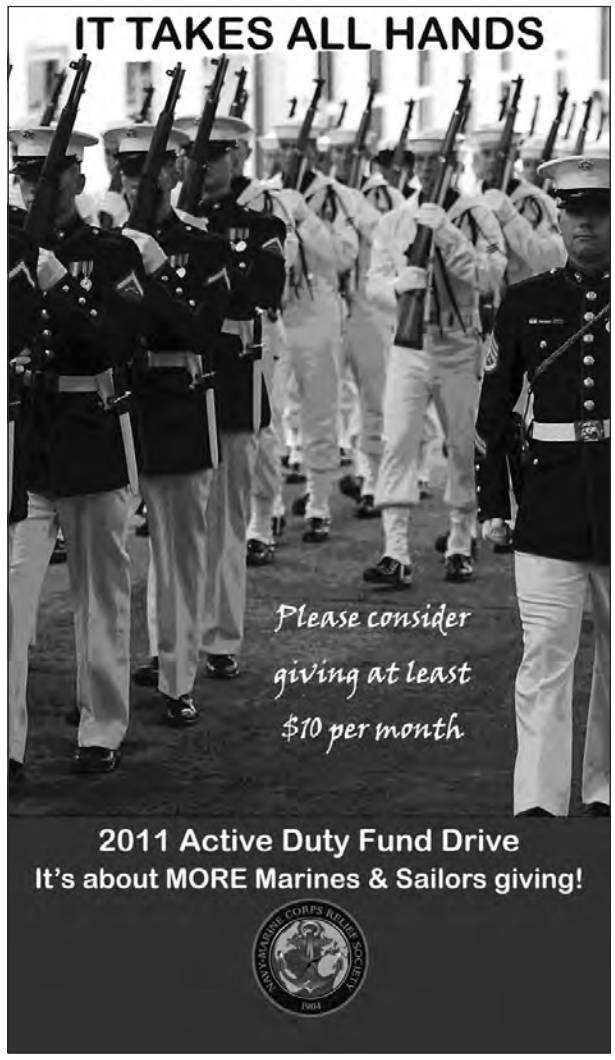
"The Society itself is here to help Sailors and Marines, and since it is run mostly by volunteers who dedicate their time to help us, it's only right that we give back and make sure that it will be around to help us in the future," said Ship's Serviceman 1st Class Thomjames Pecson, CFAY command coordinator and assistant area coordinator.

During 2010, NMCRS provided financial assistance to more than 600 cases and more than $450,000 in emergency aid for Sailors and Marines, of which, more than half of them were quick assist loans.

"The society actually helped me with their quick loan program when I was a young Sailor," said Broome. "I am glad to have been given this opportunity to do something good for the Society in return."

NMCRS also offers grants in special cases that the service member does not have to pay back.

"I have a junior Sailor that works for me whose mother had just past away," said Pecson. "He didn't have the money to fly home to the funeral, so I sent him over to the relief society, and they were able to give him a grant to buy a ticket back home."



The Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS) is a private, non-profit, volunteer and charitable organization that aims to provide financial, educational and other assistance to U.S. Navy and Marine Corps service members, their eligible family members and survivors who are in need. The NMCRS Yokosuka active duty fund drive will continue through April 30.
Image courtesy of NMCRS

"You might not have had that emergency in your life to use NMCRS, but you will be helping out someone you know," said Lacaria.

The NMCRS 2011 active duty fund drive for Yokosuka will continue through April 30.