Fleet Activities, Yokosuka, Japan

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Vol. LXII, No. 14 www.cnic.navy.mil/yokosuka April 15, 2011

DoDEA town hall informs community on changes in school system

Story and photo by Joe Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) hosted a town hall meeting April 5 with Department of Defense Education Activity (DODEA) acting Director Merilee Fitzgerald to discuss changes to the school system and how the recent events in Japan will affect the learning environment.

After the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, many of the CFAY families decided to participate in the voluntary military assisted departure (VMAD). In just a matter of days, this action left some of the classes with significantly less students.

The town hall meeting was held here in the Benny Decker Theater to accommodate the large number of community members that attended to ask their questions.

"What I came to tell you and to hear from you, not just about this crisis that we are facing but about any issue that we have in the DoDEA schools and I wanted to do a couple things," said Fitzgerald. "First of all, I wanted to assure you that for those of you who are in our military forces and our civilians who support them, you make incalculable sacrifices on behalf of this nation each and every day, and we are here as a leadership team to tell you that the education of your children will not be among those sacrifices."

Fitzgerald discussed new programs and initiatives like increasing the students' math scores through a program called STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). She described that there would be increased efforts to teach second languages to younger students. She said that the students come close to being global citizens who experience many different cultures and that aspect could be used to further their learning.

Many of the questions asked were about how the rest of the year would go for the students. The parents were concerned that some locations maybe closed or that students maybe be shifted to other classes.

Fitzgerald outlined that whether a student is a part of a family that is still in Yokosuka or has relocated to another location in Japan or even traveled to the United States, those students will be have the same ability to access an education. She also emphasized that regardless of location, students that were on track to graduate before the disasters and VMAD will be able to graduate on time.

Merilee Fitzgerald, DoDEA acting director, answers questions at a CFAY town hall meeting held at the Benny Decker Theater April 5. Fitzgerald discussed changes to the school system and how the recent events in Japan affect the learning environment. She emphasized that learning will continue with as close to a normal schedule as possible.

Programs like the virtual high school that allows students to get to some of their course material through an internet connection were made available before Fitzgerald visited, and she reiterated their importance for students that need to use them.

Fitzgerald also stated that as long there are students who are attending the schools, the same classes and programs will continue to be held. There was no plan to consolidate, close or augment the existing schools or classes. She also said that there should be a prom and that students should go and enjoy the dance with their friends even though their date may have relocated. All of these efforts were directed at making the best of a school year that was interrupted by outside forces.

Japanese Defense Minister Kitazawa thanks service members

By Lisa Daniel, American Forces Press Service

Japanese Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa boarded *USS Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76), April 4, to thank U.S. service members for their help after a magnitude 9.0 earthquake and tsunami struck Japan March 11.

The work of U.S. service members and other Americans is a testament to the half century of *tomodachi* – friendship - between the United States and Japan, Kitazawa said as he shared a statement from Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

"To all U.S. military members, on behalf of the people of Japan, I sincerely express my deep appreciation for the tremendous support provided by the U.S. military, the U.S. government and the American people at a time of unprecedented crisis in Japan," Kitazawa said.

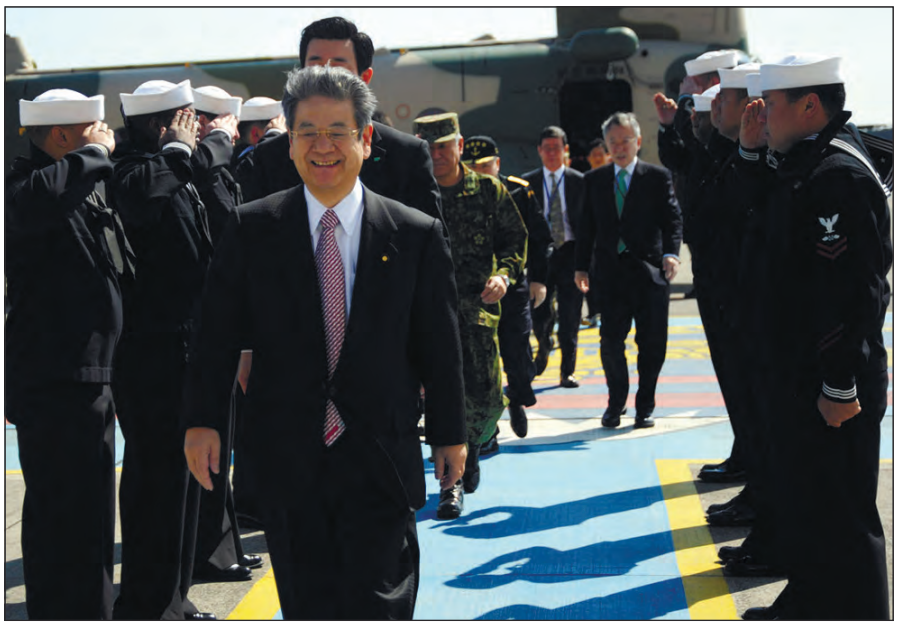
The aircraft carrier responded immediately after the disaster, and its Sailors, as well as other service members, continue the humanitarian mission in Japan "with pride and passion" and "are supporting Japan on an extraordinary scale," he said.

As of March 25, more than 1,000 Sailors and Marines were deployed in support of Operation *Tomodachi* and had flown more than 450 missions for recovery, transport and supplies distribution, according to U.S. embassy officials in Tokyo.

Kitazawa said he received a call from President Barack Obama right after the earthquake, pledging American support.

"The entire Japanese people are deeply moved and encouraged by scenes of U.S. military members working hard in support of relief efforts," he said. "Those in Japan and the United States are true *tomodachi*. ...They share basic values such as democracy and respect for human rights."

Faced with such a disaster, Kitazawa said, "in no time like the present do I feel so strongly about our friendship with the United States. Your support is a testament of our enduring bond for more than half a century. Japan, with your continuous cooperation, is determined to launch a full-scale effort to overcome these challenges ahead of us."



Japan Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa arrives on the flight line at NAF Atsugi April 4, to receive a brief with other officials before departing for the aircraft carrier *USS Ronald Reagan* (CVN 76).

U.S. Navy photo by MCSA Vivian Blakely

U.S. Ambassador to Japan, John V. Roos, was part of the delegation that included senior Japanese military officials aboard the carrier.

"Looking out over this spectacular view, in front of all you great Americans, I am awed to be here, and I can't tell you how deeply moved I am by all you've accomplished in the last several weeks," he said.

Roos offered U.S. condolences to the Japanese, noting that he saw the disaster's effects firsthand in northeastern Japan.

"One cannot even begin to imagine the devastation until you witness it yourself, and even then it's hard to imagine," Roos said. "I met with people who lost almost everything in their lives, including their loved ones," he continued. "I could not help but be moved by their calm dignity and resilient spirit."

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Port Ops support ships, barges during Japan crisis

CFAY Port Ops has provided support to ships participating in Operation *Tomodachi* and barges filled with fresh water for Japan's damaged nuclear reactor plant.

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Command master chief addresses Japanese spouse group

CFAY CMC Gregory A. Vidaurri spoke with spouses of service members April 6, about how the base is responding to the effects of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

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