Students, local organizations help improve ocean ecosystem

Story and photo by Joe Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) Public Works Department Environmental Division, Kanagawa Prefectural Fisheries Technologies Center, and students and staff from The Sullivans Elementary School joined together to plant eel grass and release young fish into the base marina May 16.

"It's part of the Earth Day events [and our third time] that we've coordinated with the Kanagawa Prefectural Fisheries Technologies Center to get the kids engaged with helping [to] save the earth," said Eric Rankin deputy Public Works officer. "The main purpose of this event is to improve the marine ecosystem. The eel grass provides some food for the fish as well as a shelter for them and a place to spawn."

The students picked up blocks of paper clay, a biodegradable white clay, and shaped them around the roots of the young eel grass. The clay acts as an anchor for the plant that would normally float away if it were just placed in the water. The eel grass was then given to divers who then submerged under water and planted the eel grass.

"It helps them learn to be good stewards of the environment from a young age," said Steven Parker, a teacher at The Sullivans School. "We didn't always learn it when we were young, but now that they are learning it at a younger age, they will be able to save even more of the environment for future generations."

After the grass had been planted, the students lined up to start releasing the young marbled flounder into the marina. The fish were about half the size of a playing card and can grow to be more than a foot in length. They are part of the regularly found ecosystem in the area and once mature, they can provide a source of food.

(Left) The Sullivans Elementary School student Conner McAllister, returns a paper clay wrapped eel grass seedling to CFAY Public Works Department Environmental Division employee Hisako Mawatari, who collects the grass before giving it to a diver to plant in the base marina May 16.

"It was a good field trip," said Conner McAllister, a student at Sullivans. "We learned a lot and I got to help the environment."

Workers from the Kanagawa Prefectural Fisheries Technologies Center helped the students accomplish both tasks and gave out some extra information such as how the Emperor of Japan also released the same type of fish into the ecosystem, but in a different location.

"We all share the same environment," said Parker. "It's important that we work together, especially with our host country, to protect it."

Rankin added that they plan on continuing the program but everyone can do something everyday.

"No matter how small, if you take action, you can always help and improve the environment," he said.

Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society hold awards ceremony

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

The Yokosuka Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society presented awards to 19 volunteers at an award ceremony here at the Benny Decker Theater May 26.

Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Commanding Officer Capt. David A. Owen and Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society co-honorary chair of volunteers Char Haley were guest presenters for the event.

"These volunteers who are military spouses themselves, man the desk and help people during stressful situations," said Haley. "They are serving our country and our [military] services everyday. If they weren't here to volunteer at Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, there would not be a Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society."

According to the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, they awarded four volunteers for their exceptional service during the recent situation that occurred after the earthquake and tsunami in March.

"This was a surprise and an honor to be recognized," said Tricia Marino, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, Yokosuka office, chairman of volunteers. "The relief society is a great stepping stone," said Marino. "Anyone who wants to volunteer and doesn't want to leave a gap in their resume should come and volunteer here."

Many use the volunteer opportunities offered by the Society to learn new skills or share their skills by serving others.

"I recently got a new job and the experience and knowledge I learned here with the relief society was a major factor for me getting this job," said Marino.

The Society is a private, non-profit, volunteer, service organization whose vision includes a commitment to ensure that all available resources are used to assist personnel of the naval services - active, retired and their eligible family members - to achieve financial self-sufficiency and find solutions to emergency needs.

"During the six-week period after the earthquake and tsunami, we would not have been able to keep our doors open without their service and dedication of our volunteers," said Amy Lacaria, Yokosuka Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society director.

(Left) Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society volunteers Yuko Lyons, Cora Gutierrez, Tricia Marino and Christina Sextella received awards recognizing their dedication and exceptional service during an awards ceremony at the Benny Decker Theater May 26.

According to the Society, volunteering at your local Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society office can be a rewarding experience. While helping clients solve their emergency needs, you can enhance your job skills and knowledge of oral and written communications, retail sales, customer service, public speaking, computer software programs, training, personnel management and family budgeting. Opportunities for personal growth help you increase your self-confidence while you help clients achieve financial self-sufficiency. Contact the Yokosuka office for more information.