MWR Auto Skills Center helps improve automobile–hobby enthusiasts' skills

Story and photo by Greg Mitchell, CFAY Public Affairs

For those who enjoy the challenge of automobile repair or assembling, the Morale and Welfare Recreation (MWR) Auto Skills Center onboard Comander Fleet Activities Yokosuka Base is a place to go for all your service needs to be met.

The Auto Skills Center gives patrons the ability to access the center's extensive collection of tools and also have a knowledgeable staff of mechanics who are available for assistance if needed. One of the services provided on a monthly basis is training, by way of maintenance classes, which focus on improving overall knowledge on automobile maintenance and repairs.

Those who choose to participate inn the classes will perform all training on a privately-owned-vehicle (POV). If participants are 16 years or under, they must be accompanied by their parents or a legal guardian.

Auto Skill Center Night Manager Tommy Johnson instructs HM2 Josue Castro on the proper removal of an oil plug of an oil pan at the Yokosuka MWR Auto Skill Center at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka.

"Outside of knowledge, hands-on training and tool familiarity, the participant has the opportunity to get to know their vehicle," said Auto Skill Center Night Manager Tommy Johnson. "Knowing your vehicle could more than likely save you a substantial amount of money in the long run just by having the know-how of performing simple maintenance."

The first class is Auto Maintenance, which focuses on intermediate engine tune-ups. The three-hour course focuses on teaching students the techniques necessary to successfully complete a basic automobile tune-up. Amongst the topics covered are the function and inspection of the spark ignition system and how to remove and to replace spark plugs, rotor caps, and all fuel and air filters.

Once the class is finished, patrons have the option of working on their own vehicle under the supervision of the instructor and staff members.

"One of the most important aspects of engine tune-ups that people need to know is that number of kilometers on a car can determine its ability to respond to treatment," said Johnson. "Spark plugs are important because if they are worn out, they will not be able to generate the correct spark or power used to push the engine, therefore affecting overall engine effectiveness. With air filters, if the air intake is clogged in any way, this will also affect overall engine performance as well."

The second class focuses on teaching Automatic Transmission Fluid for beginning-level maintenance. During this class, students will gain an understanding on why automatic transmission fluid is essential for the operation of your car. The course is three hours and is designed to teach students how to check and to change automatic transmission fluid as well as any associated filters.

"The most difficult thing I have found with up and coming auto enthusiasts is the ability to effectively troubleshoot a vehicle, said Johnson. "For example, the idling of a car; when you have an ear of experience, you have a good feel for that proper sound coming out of the engine. It is an important skill that you develop over time."

The Auto Skills Center is a multi-purpose training facility that attempts to give service members and their families the opportunity to exercise their skill set, but the center also provides several public services. Towing and junking services are provided as well as the ability to locate parts for patrons, which sometimes may involve communicating with local Japanese junk yards to find what you need.

"The big difference between us and a typical American auto service center… is that we have a part locator program in place, as well as one for tires," said Johnson. "It can be a burden for people living overseas with the differences in language to effectively communicate enough so that the Japanese can provide them the materials that they would need to fix, upgrade or restore their vehicles. That's where we come in to be that bridge and help alleviate potential misunderstandings."

The Yokosuka Auto Skills Center is open Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays noon–8p.m.; Saturdays and Sundays 9a.m.-5p.m., and is located adjacent to Chili's, directly behind the Navy Exchange Autoport.

Navy Misawa CPO 365 program helps Japanese community

By MC2 Pedro A. Rodriguez,
Naval Air Facility Misawa Public Affairs

AOMORI, Japan – Members of the Navy Misawa CPO 365 program traveled to the city of Aomori to help with a clean-up project, July 27.

Following a two-hour bus ride from Misawa to the Aomori Christian Center, more than 25 chief petty officers (CPOs) and first class petty officers immediately got to work. Together they spent the day chopping and moving firewood, digging the foundation and laying cement for a sidewalk, and clearing and mowing field areas.

"We've got folks from the Fukushima area who are going to be coming out and staying here for a while," said Bruce Truss, Aomori Christian Center representative.

Fukishima was heavily impacted by the March 11, 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, which triggered a subsequent tsunami that devastated the country's northeastern coastline.

"I think an event like this is good for our CPO 365 participants, because it shows the teamwork that we chief petty officers emphasize," said Chief Navy Counselor Todd Wean, NAF Misawa command career counselor, and a native of Clearwater, Fla. "It also gives the CPO board-eligible first classes an opportunity to interact with the chiefs, while simultaneously making an impact in our host-nation community."

The volunteers included Sailors from Naval Air Facility Misawa, as well as its tenant and deployed commands. Throughout the past year, the CPO 365 program has conducted numerous community relation projects, with the Aomori project being the final large-scale undertaking during Phase II. The Navy's CPO results will likely be announced this week, and the CPO 365 Program will begin Phase III, which commences CPO induction.

The Aomori Christian Center is a meeting hub for northern Japan churches, and its personnel use the facilities to plan and organize the outreach of the church in the community. The center has also been utilized as an alternate location for Japanese citizens impacted by the earthquake.

"If it wasn't for volunteers like the guys from the U.S. Navy who come out here and do the big jobs, I think we would have no other choice but to eventually close the doors," said Truss, a native of Meriden, Conn.